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The Wiles of Women

Turkish Stories

Collected by J. A. DECOURDEMANCHE

The Porcelain Junk

A Romance of the Southern Ocean

By J. DELTEIL

The Book of the Marvels of India

Arabian Travellers' Tales

By BUZURG IBN SHAHRIYAR

The Shoji or Sliding Screen

By KIKOU YAMATA

OTHER VOLUMES IN PREPARATION

———————
GEORGE ROUTLEDGE & SONS LTD.

The Wives of Women

From the Turkish by

J. A. DECOURDEMANCHE

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George Routledge & Sons, Ltd.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

THE art of the story-teller has flourished in every part of the East for many centuries, and the literature of the West, in its inception, drew very largely from Eastern themes, elaborating and enlarging them, and putting on them, as it were, a Western complexion. In the East itself, we find the same themes occurring in different forms, worked up and presented with varying degrees of literary skill. The tales of the present volume are given in what is perhaps their simplest form. They begin with a selection from a popular collection, the Mikri-Zenan or "*The Wiles of Women*," which was written down in Turkish, probably from memory, from the narrations of story-tellers in Egypt. The manuscript from which the version was originally made is ascribed to the eighteenth century.

In addition to the stories from "*The Wiles of Women*," certain tales have been given from another collection, that called Feredj-bad-Shiddeh, or "*Pleasure after Pain*". These include the exploits of the redoubtable Dellé, and two longer stories: *The Architect, his Wife, and the Three Viziers*, and *Taher and his Brethren*.

European versions of portions of "*Pleasure after Pain*" have been included by Galland in his edition of

EDITOR'S NOTE

The Thousand and One Nights, *and by Pétis de la Croix, in his Les Mille et un Jours, but these were, in many cases, completely remote from the originals. Readers who are sufficiently interested may compare the story of "Taber and His Brethren" which is the last given in this book, with Pétis de la Croix's version in Les Mille et un Jours, where it appears as the tale of Atalmulc.*

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PART ONE
THE WILES OF WOMEN

Chapter One

The Weaver who became a Conjuror



ONCE on a time, a wife who lived in the town of Nishapour had two lovers.

She said to them one day :

“ Alas ! my husband is dying and I must go to him.”

Then she left them.

One of her lovers now said to the other :

“ When will her husband die ? All this is very tiresome. I mean to leave the town and pass some time in the neighbourhood.”

And having thus spoken, away he went to spend several days in the country.

Now one of the two lovers was a young weaver of the place. The other had been away only a little time when the husband died.

Then the lady went to find the weaver, and she lived with him. But he was so mistrustful of her that, when he left the house, he locked the door behind him and took the key away ; and when she went to the baths he accompanied her, and waited at the door till she came out ; then he took her back to the house.

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Some time passed in this fashion.

By and by the other lover left the country and returned to the town. And in spite of all his efforts he could find no means of seeing the lady again, not even once.

One day, as he wandered around her house, he noticed that a building in the district was occupied by an old woman.

For a day or two he came and went, always hoping to meet the object of his fancies.

Then the old woman said to him :

" My son, for two days have I seen you going and coming hereabouts. Why do you roam in this way ? Do you love a woman somewhere nearby ? Be frank."

" Alas, my good mother," the young man answered, " I do indeed love a certain lady." He named her. " Nor have I caught sight of her for some time, because I have been absent from the town. Now I am here once more, but I have not been able to see my mistress again."

" My son," the old woman said, " her husband is dead ; and she is living with a weaver."

" Good mother, my fate is woeful ! Now I can understand all that has befallen me." He began to cry, adding : " She has kindled a fire at my heart."

" Do not despair, my poor child," the old woman said. " I can easily find a means of bringing you together. Trust yourself to me."

Without further delay she took her staff and went to the weaver's house. She rapped on

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the door, the weaver came and took her into the house ; and they exchanged greetings. He begged her to enter into his workshop and to seat herself, and he sat down near to her.

“ My son,” she said, “ does this house now belong to you ? ”

“ It belongs actually and wholly to me,” the weaver answered.

“ Formerly,” she said, “ it belonged to one of my friends, and we were accustomed to seeing each other.”

“ So it shall be with us, if you so desire, my good mother. I will visit you and you shall come here.”

“ But have you not a lady with you ? ” she said. “ I should be charmed to make her acquaintance.”

At these words she rose and passed into a room beyond the workshop ; and the weaver allowed her to do so alone.

Immediately the old woman drew near to the lady, she said :

“ Ah, my daughter ! a young man, who loved you and left the town, has now returned ; and he is more devoted to you than ever. He is distracted almost to death, and his tears are tears of blood. He is such a young man too ; you cannot wish to leave him to his tears. Will you not consent to see him once more ? ”

“ Alas, my mother,” the lady said, “ there are no means of my seeing him ; for my husband the weaver never leaves me an instant. And if

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"My dear lady, if you will indeed serve me, make haste, come with me at once to my wife. Alas, she is verily in danger."

He began to cry.

"Truly, I wish I could," the old woman said, "but to-day, one of my friends, a young man, has given a chest into my charge, and he has gone away. If I leave it unguarded in this old place, a thief could smash the door, and make off with it. And then what should I say to the owner?"

At these words the weaver examined the chest and convinced himself that it could be removed.

"My good mother," he said, "if you agree, I will take up the chest and carry it to the house as you come with me. I beg you to decide quickly; for my wife is very ill and she suffers exceedingly."

"If this is so," the old woman said, "take the chest and follow me; and I will be a second mother to you. Your wife will recover in my hands, because I shall not leave her till she is quite cured. But, above all, be cautious to avoid mentioning tears and sorrow and such woeful things in her presence, because nothing is so bad for an invalid. She would be unable to sleep, and that causes fatigue."

The weaver in his agitation assured the old gossip of his faithful obedience. He trussed the chest with a stout rope; then, as if he himself would introduce the wolf to the sheepfold, he

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raised his burden. And so they reached the house, the old woman in front, the weaver behind.

There the silly fellow put his burden on the ground, took the keys, opened the door; and he hurried with the chest to the room where his wife lay moaning.

Now when she had seen the approach of her husband and the old woman, alone together, she had been seated near to the bed; and as they drew near, she unclothed herself, got into bed, and assumed an attitude of suffering.

When she saw that her lover was not with them, she was much troubled. And she said to herself:

“Alas! my pains are without remedy and no one can help me and the light of my life has gone from me. . . . If at this moment,” she added aloud, raising her arms to Heaven, and addressing the old busybody, “my trust in you is illfounded, then I have lost all hope.”

“My daughter,” the schemer answered, “why afflict yourself in this way? We must cure your pains forthwith.”

Then she said to the weaver:

“My son, away you go in quest of water, to be mixed with earth taken from the grave of an old Jew.”

Straightway the doleful husband plucked up the skirts of his robe, so that he might run the more easily, and off he went, having turned the key in the door behind him.

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Then the lady leapt from the bed to her feet, seemingly free from her pains ; and now—the door having been locked securely by the husband—out came the gallant. The two lovers embraced, languishing in tender ecstasies ; and so until the weaver, returning, had almost reached the threshold of the door. At the sound of him, the gallant went back to the chest, lay down, and was locked in.

Soon after, he gathered from the renewed cries torn from the lady that the weaver had entered the room once more. And the weaver carried the water and the earth, and set them down in the middle of the room. The old woman carefully made the mixture and, without any delay, applied it to the reins and the belly of the lady, rubbing to and fro and up and down ; then she enwrapped her in several blankets. And she said to the weaver :

“ From this day you must let her enjoy complete rest.”

“ So it shall be,” he answered.

At these words he withdrew to his shop and set himself again to work.

His faithful wife felt most anxious to do likewise with her lover ; but the weaver was near-by. Eventually, however, during the day, he left the house in order to make some purchase. And before he had properly barred the door, the lady besought her lover to come from his hiding-place ; and they resumed the interrupted conversation together. And he flew to

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the chest again when the unfortunate husband was about to open the house-door.

In short, a week passed thus, and then the young lady became convalescent ; to say truth, she was cured, for possession had appeased her ardour and her tears alike.

Now the old woman said to the weaver :

“ My son, here have I been eight days absent from my home. Perhaps the owner of the chest has been to reclaim his property. I shall be favoured if you will carry it to my house.”

“ It shall be as you wish, my good mother,” the willing fellow answered.

He shouldered the chest forthwith, shut the door of his house ; and away they went at a slow pace, the old woman in front, the porter behind.

Night drew near, and they progressed tardily ; for the chest was heavy, so heavy that the weaver, overcome by fatigue, let his burden glide to earth. He rested awhile ; but the old woman continued on her way, unaware of the halt. The weaver failed now to see her, yet he was not disquieted. He said to himself that he knew the whereabouts of her house ; and he shouldered his burden anew.

Meanwhile night thickened and he could not make out his surroundings, and so he lost his way. Presently he realised his error and retraced his steps. But now all was dark, nor could he possibly see anything ; hence his inability to find the track to his own house.

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On he went at hazard ; then, unknown to himself, he turned down the road in which the house of the azas-bashi¹ stood ; and here he met a police-patrol. The officers were quick to spy a man charged with a burden twice as big as himself and bent under it.

They told each other that he must have accomplices, who had crept to a house and made entry. The chest doubtless held the plunder ; and this fellow was certainly carrying it to some den. They determined to question him about his companions and their place of hiding. They would discover the thieves by making him carry the chest to the hiding-place ; for here, one by one, the thieves would arrive, and could be arrested : afterward, news would be forthcoming of a house entered by robbers ; and assuredly it must be some great palace.

Thereupon the officials accosted the weaver, saying to him :

“ Stop ! Where are you going at this hour of night and with that chest ? What house have you robbed ? And how many are there of you ? Where are they hiding ? Take us there at once ; and tell us what is in the chest.”

The poor weaver stood rooted to the ground, in a stupour ; and his blood chased from his heels to his scalp. He said :

“ Truly I cannot make out what you are talking about, and I am bewildered and my wits are in confusion. The long and short of it is

¹ Sergeant of the Watch.

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that I have only one answer to clear myself. I am a conjuror. This morning I went to the Fair in front of the royal palace ; and the chest holds the gear of my trade."

" But why are you returning alone at this hour of night ? "

" It was already late when I sent my assistant to our house ; and I have been awaiting his return till this moment. But he failed to come for the chest, so I am in a dilemma, and night-foundered. I had set the chest on to my back and had started off ; but I missed the way, and now I cannot find my house. I was wandering at hazard, searching, when you came on me."

" No good telling lies," the officers said to him. " You are a thief and indeed you look like a thief. You and your fellows have broken into a house and have stolen the chest : that is the truth of it."

Then they added among themselves :

" Let us take him to the azas-bashi ; for he is the one to get to the core of this matter."

So they took hold of the weaver and led him to their chief.

The azas-bashi said :

" Who is this man ? "

" We cannot tell," the officers answered. " We met him in such and such a place ; and he was carrying this chest on his back. He says he is a conjuror. He declares he has been to the royal-palace square this morning ; and that at nightfall he set off home and lost his

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way. We cannot tell whether he does or does not speak truth."

The azas-bashi, it is necessary to know, had a young and very pretty wife, on whom he doated. She was enchanted by conjurors and jugglers, and never ceased asking her husband to send for such folk. Now the azas-bashi was thinking of this whilst his underlings were making their report. He said to the weaver :

"Is it true that you are a conjuror?"

"Indeed, your worship," the weaver answered, "such is my trade. I have only been in this town a few days, and no one has yet come forward who can be compared with me. That is why it seemed profitable to me to make for this place."

"If that is the way of it," the azas-bashi said, "you come with me to my house and bring the chest and show your tricks privately; then, in the morning, you can go home."

At these words, the azas-bashi rose, telling the weaver to follow him; and he went to the house and rapped on the door.

Now the azas-bashi's wife had a lover; who came to her each night so that they might be happy together while the husband was occupied elsewhere.

The azas-bashi had approached the house as his wife and her lover were thus employed; in fact, as the azas-bashi drew near, his wife, thinking she would be free to amuse herself until dawn, lay in her skin under a counterpane.

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The azas-bashi again rapped on the door.

The servants, roused, hastened to open the door for him ; and they recognised his worship their master. Instantly one of them flew to the inner rooms and told her mistress of the husband's arrival.

The lover was likewise in his skin ; and, since there chanced to be a great jar in the room, he was persuaded to hide in it. A moment after, the azas-bashi appeared. He had left the weaver and his chest outside for the time being.

Now a window of the room overlooked the court. And at the precise second when the weaver with the chest on his back was passing by, he had glanced through the hangings into the room, and had seen the lady busily hiding an unclothed fellow in the jar. And the weaver, without giving sign that he had noticed anything, said to himself :

“ Now I see the trick I can play.”

He entered the room and saw the azas-bashi and his wife seated side by side ; and she was saying :

“ My dear, you have never come home at this hour before. What has happened to bring you here to-night ? ”

“ You know my love for you,” he said. “ And always you are asking why it is that I, an azas-bashi, cannot discover the means of bringing a conjuror or a juggler to you. Well, just now, a master-conjuror came my way ; and immediately I brought him here to amuse you with his craft.”

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He turned to the weaver, adding :

"Come along. Here is a chance to show yourself ; and see that you give of your best."

"Unhappily, your worship," the weaver said, "my assistant is not with me. Also, I am short of implements and tackle, because they are stored in this chest and my assistant has the key ; so I might as well be without them, though they are actually in the chest. If you will permit me, I can go home, and return to-morrow morning with my assistant, after having made the needful preparation. Then you shall have the pleasure of a most elaborate performance."

At these words the azas-bashi rose in a fury.

"Stay where you are !" he said. "I command you !"

He seized an axe, continuing :

"Open this chest at once. Show us your mystery without further delay, or I shall crack the chest to splinters with this axe."

Then the man hidden in the chest said :

"For goodness sake stop him and his axe ! If he cracks the chest in splinters, surely he will kill me, or at least maim me !"

Now the azas-bashi wanted to know who on earth could be shouting thus in the chest, and what he was doing there ; and he began to repent of his adventure, and his heart clattered like a tambourine.

"My master," the weaver said, "for pity's sake do not distress yourself about this chest.

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There is no need to believe now, nor at any time, that the habit makes the monk."

"Out upon all these daft tales!" the azas-bashi said. "Open the thing instantly and do your mystery; or, I tell you, I will open it myself."

When the weaver saw that there was no way of escape, he changed his tactics.

"Well, well, your worship," he said, "if you are quite set on seeing what is in my chest, then I mean to find out what is in this jar."

The azas-bashi's wife, at this answer, knew that the weaver had seen her hiding her lover, and that if her husband opened the chest, then the weaver would reveal the lover in the jar and all must be found out.

"Be patient," she said, "Do not smash this man's chest. Restrain yourself from such violence. I am not in the mood now for conjuring tricks, so let the poor fellow go hence. Tomorrow, like an honest man he will return with his assistant and his gear; then he can show us his skill."

So she besought her husband; but her efforts were vain. And the azas-bashi once more seized the axe.

"Open the chest and begin your show," he said, and with increased vexation, "or verily I will smash it to bits with my axe."

He turned to his wife and went on:

"In future, take care that never again do you beg me to bring conjurors to you for your

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amusement and then tell me to send them off."

She, however, was yet in dread that the lover she had concealed in the jar might be found, and that her naughty capers would be made known. Therefore she began once more to beseech her husband, repeating :

"I do not want him to show his tricks."

She went on without pause, always thinking of the jar :

"I beg as a favour that you will not make him perform now."

The weaver, during this wrangle, approached the chest and began to spy round and about for the keyhole ; and by and by he discovered a small opening due to the fact that formerly a different lock had been in use. He said to himself :

"Now if I peered through this hole I should know what was inside ; and by the same means I might be able to raise the cover an inch."

And he proceeded so to peep, and saw a man naked and bent almost double. He had a revelation of the truth, did in fact raise the cover, and let it fall again.

He said to himself :

"Clearly the saying that there is no constancy among women is a just one ; and that the wary may be caught napping even as the unwary is a proverb equally just. I have watched my wife without respite ; I have observed her

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with a jealous eye ; I myself have locked the door of my house and have put the key in my pocket ; she has never gone to the baths unaccompanied, yet this has not prevented her from making a fool and a dupe of me, nor from introducing a lover to my house, nor from giving herself to him under my very nose. And if I may judge by what I see, the azas-bashi is in the same pickle."

When he had so spoken to himself, he sighed ; and he added :

" Truly I cannot tell exactly what is happening ; but I must contrive to find a means of getting out of this fix."

He reflected ; then he said to the azas-bashi :

" Your worship, while you have been stamping on the floor and giving way to your vexation, your humble servant has found the keys of the chest, and so it is open. Therefore, since now you are in a more amiable mood, I can give you a sample of my mystery ; something quite astonishing, the like of which has never been attempted by any other conjuror, something never seen before at any time ; nor have I myself hitherto succeeded in it."

" Do as you say," the azas-bashi answered ; " I demand nothing better."

And he put the axe on the floor and seated himself close to his wife ; and they were alike impatient to know what sort of curious sight the weaver was about to afford them. Meanwhile the lady felt more reassured.

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Then the conjuror said :

“ I lack my sieve. May I be allowed at least to have a platter ? ”

The master of the house gave orders, and a slave brought the platter.

The conjuror took it from the slave, and began his incantation, saying :

“ All is ready : you shall be made to come out of the chest, and you shall be made to come out of the jar ; and each shall issue forth to meet the other, and each shall wish the other joy—so by the might of this glittering platter ! ”

He twirled the platter in his hands, and said in a loud voice :

“ Come forth, I tell thee ! Enwonder with a wondrous enwonderment. Come forth, I tell thee ! Enmarvel by a marvellous enmarvellment. ”

He dropped the platter suddenly, leapt at the chest, and thrust his hand into the aforementioned hole.

Then from the bowels of that chest, they heard a stifled voice saying :

“ You son of a slave ! Your wife crammed me into this chest, and now, if you want me to come out of it, then have out the fellow from the jar. By the power of your platter, let him come frisking to me ; and, in a like manner, I will come forth to meet him. But we must be allowed to depart forthwith ; otherwise, I swear by Allah ! I will fly away like a falcon with the azas-bashi, and with you, too, if

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either of you so much as dare to move an inch. Now proceed, and no more delay."

Immediately the weaver seized the platter again, drew near to the jar, and plunged his hand into the throat of it. And now the fellow in the jar had his say :

"You son of a slave ! I saw you when I sprang into this jar. And if you want me to come out of it, I will only do so when the other is out of the chest. I shall go to meet him ; then, at my own good pace, I shall make for the door. So it must be done ; for, if the azas-bashi choses to put any obstacle in my path, verily I will snatch the pair of you, as a falcon snatches its prey. Now take heed, and give me warning when I must come out. Such are the orders I have for you."

On hearing these injunctions, the lady, seated near to her husband, began to change colour, on the verge of a swoon. Her husband noticed her condition ; and he said :

"My beloved, why are you troubled ?"

"I am indeed troubled," she answered ; "for I cannot tell what sort of creatures will come out of the chest and the jar."

"Be calm, my dear," the azas-bashi said ; "these are only conjuror's tricks, illusions of the sight, phantoms. No living man will come out either from the chest or the jar ; therefore do not be affrighted at sight of them, but regard the whole thing as an amusing distraction and a game."

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At this explanation the lady decided to take comfort ; and she gave herself to her own reflections, saying to herself :

“ What must I tell my husband if he recognises the man who comes from the jar ? My faith ! I do not know. I must act in accord with the circumstance.”

Now she felt in possession of herself.

In the meantime, the azas-bashi was absorbed, wondering in fact what would come from the chest and the jar. Then the weaver stooped to the jar, flourishing the platter in his hand.

“ Your worship,” he said, addressing the azas-bashi, “ may it please you to order your slaves to open the door to the road. This is necessary if we would succeed in emptying the chest and the jar ; one of the most remarkable tricks known to the world, as no doubt you will admit. Unless you grant this condition, I cannot fulfil my pledge. Since the trick is to be performed in front of you, it is proper that you help me to success ; for, without your aid the whole thing will fail, though 'tis the most beautiful trick ever performed by any conjuror.”

At these words the azas-bashi ordered that all the doors should be opened.

This done, the weaver began to strike the platter.

“ Now come forth and enrapture us !” he said. “ Now come forth and amaze us !” he repeated.

Then they saw the lid of the chest uplifted ;

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and a man came out and began to balance himself rhythmically.

"Indeed, he is a clever conjuror," the azas-bashi said to his wife; "and, to fulfill his programme, it needs only that someone should likewise come from the jar, and that the pair should skip about one before the other."

"Since the one has come out of the chest," she answered, "most certainly the conjuror will bring the other from the jar. If he succeeds, truly it will be an astounding trick on his part."

Even at that moment the weaver, furnished with his platter, stepped close to the jar. And he said in a loud voice:

"Now then! come out and startle us, and we shall know that the jar is also worthy to be admired. Give us proof; let us see!"

The lover of the lady hidden in the jar was a butcher. And out he came, advancing to meet the fellow from the chest; and together they began to play their capers, one facing the other.

The azas-bashi said to his wife:

"Now do not let him frighten you, my dear; they are only phantoms, not live creatures."

After the appearance of the butcher, and whilst the pair were dancing about, the weaver gave them a wink and motioned to the door.

And when the lovers of the two ladies, busy with their pantomime in the middle of the room, noticed the weaver's signal, alike they said to themselves that the opportunity was ripe.

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And in the midst of their gambols and friskings, little by little they drew near to the door; and, once out of the house, they took to their heels and fled, and found refuge in the guard-room of the mounted-police.¹

The weaver, seeing their escape, said to himself :

“ They are saved not only by their own cunning, but by the skill of a man who, in getting himself out of his own scrape, helps them out of theirs.”

As for the azas-bashi ; seeing the successful end to the weaver’s show, he said to himself :

“ I have watched many a conjuror’s tricks and sleight of hand ; but I cannot recall having ever heard tell of anything like this. For a fellow to make a man come out of a chest carried by himself, and another man out of one of my jars—that is genius, assuredly that is genius. Evidently he is an artist, and an artist without rival. Truly, I cannot think how such a thing might come to pass, unless it be a matter of phantoms amazingly life-like.”

Thus he was engrossed in profound reflection, filled with astonishment as he thought of the weaver’s intelligence and skill ; for he could not even imagine the cunning and contriving employed by the man.

Then the weaver said to him :

¹ This is a sly dig at the police. Folk pursued by the foot-watch seek protection with the mounted-watch. (French translator’s note.)

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“Your worship, to make a fellow come out of a chest or a jar is no great matter. But what is truly remarkable is to bring a monkey and a donkey together, forcing one to meet the other; yet this I will succeed in doing, if it so shall please you,”

“Indeed I am already convinced that you are a master in your art,” the azas-bashi said, “and by the fact of all I have seen you do; but if you succeed in bringing about the meeting you suggest, well, I shall be dumbfounded.”

“And I too,” the wife said. “I consider him unmatched in his cleverness, and in his manner of performing what he undertakes to do. In my opinion, the way he goes about his work does exceeding great honour to him. ’Tis the very summit of art, and we ought to express our gratitude to him.”

In face of this statement, the azas-bashi, to please his wife, might have now allowed the weaver to go thence, leaving a way clear for him; this idea did not occur to him, however. He said to the weaver:

“Come now, let me see this new trick you mention.”

And the weaver said to himself:

“Once let me free myself from you, and I warrant you will see no more of me.”

Then he drew his knife; and, turning to the azas-bashi, he said:

“Your worship, consider the two men who have but now so much amazed you; for does

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not the one resemble a monkey and the other a donkey ? ”

“ Well,” the azas-bashi answered, “ there may be some resemblance between a monkey and a man ; but there is none whatsoever between a donkey and a man.”

“ That is as may be,” the weaver said ; “ and now it is time to let you see what I promised, wherefore you shall be satisfied finally.”

At these words he grasped his platter with a flourish, and, twirling it, flew to the door. Then, without pause, he scampered down the steps and into the road. Away he went in his haste to the guard-room of the mounted-police ; and he opened the door and passed in for refuge.

Thenceforth he busied himself, arranging to divorce his wife. But the azas-bashi kept his wife, saying to himself that what is doomed to be will be ; also that there is no satisfying any woman wholly. And the weaver had his own peculiar views of these facts, and, in his mind, approved of himself and of his conduct ; which was never understood by the azas-bashi, since his wife’s lover took care to keep his own counsel. And so the poor man remained in complete ignorance.

“ Do as you will,” he said to his wife frequently.

And she, finding the advice agreeable, determined to follow it zealously and without ceasing ; and she sank deeper and deeper in her

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own naughtiness, because, as is evident, such advice served as an encouragement, and squared with her own inclination.

May Allah be praised and glorified in all things ! for nothing can happen without his direction and permission ; and nothing can sprout from our brows unless he wills it, a truth manifest in this tale.

Chapter Two

The Azas-Bashi



IN THE city of Cairo there was a certain azas-bashi¹ known to everybody.

His long experience as an officer had given him much knowledge about all things relating to women.

On one occasion, as he made his round of the city, and in the heat of the day, he grew tired and spied for a shady nook where he might rest; and he saw a bench of stone protected from the sun.

Here he lay down, enjoying the freshness, beginning to feel sleepy; but on a sudden he heard steps and was disquieted. He roused himself at once, looked about him, and noticed an open purse nearby. He took it, observed that it was full of gold; and he counted a hundred pieces. But though he searched to the right and the left, he could see no living creature; and he said to himself:

“This is a strange adventure. Who indeed can have put this thing here?”

¹ See page 12

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He could not recover from his astonishment, and he took to his way again, passing on thoughtfully.

Night fell, and day came again. Then our azas-bashi, as usual, set forth on his casual rounds ; and eventually, overcome by the heat, he found himself at the point he had reached the day before, laid himself on the bench, oppressed with fatigue, and fell asleep.

On the instant, yet again someone drew near ; and once more the azas-bashi started up and discovered a purse nearby, containing a hundred pieces of gold. But though he looked round and about, he could see no one in the neighbourhood.

Now he was more astonished than ever ; and he left the place and went home, saying to himself as he set off :

“ Verily this gold comes to me in a most wonderful fashion ; and it is essential to find out who gives it to me, and for what purpose. To this end I will return anew to the place, and will feign sleep ; and if someone comes again, I shall be able so to assure myself of the truth.”

Night fell and he went to bed. And when day broke, he rose and left his house, visiting the several parts of the city ; then, toward noon, and when the heat of the day became stifling, he reached the bench of stone and sat down.

He was intent to accomplish his design, and he began by having his midday meal ; then he looked here and there again and yet again, finally

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laid himself on the bench ; and, although weary, he determined to remain awake while pretending to be asleep.

Meanwhile, time after time, he peered from half-shut eye-lids ; and all at once he saw a purse of gold, held by a dainty hand. Our man sat up promptly ; and he grabbed the hand at the moment when, all of a tremble, it was about to be withdrawn.

As he held it he saw that the arm was encircled by a bracelet ornamented with a rare diamond and precious stones ; then he raised his glance to the face of a woman, and realised that never before had he seen any thing so beautiful. By her grace and her loveliness she glorified the God who had created her : and her complexion was like jasmine, and her eyebrows were arched, and her fingers tapered. Although thus adorned by nature, yet she wore brocade and figured silks.

At sight of her, the poor man in his amazement and surprise could not tell whether he confronted a human being or a sprite ; for her charms had sown disquiet at his heart. Never since he had become an azas-bashi at Cairo had he experienced such feelings ; never had he seen anything so alluring and of such perfect beauty.

“ My lovely one,” he said, having calmed himself a little, “ of what rose-bed are you the blossom, of what bouquet are you the hyacinth, of what garden the nightingale ?

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Who are you and whence come you? There can be no peace for me until I know, for though I have seen many beautiful women, none is comparable to you. And tell me also why you have given this gold to me, since I am eager to do all in my power for you."

Immediately she answered :

"I am only a feeble woman. One day, by chance, I saw the daughter of the Judge at the baths, and she enchanted me. She took possession of my whole being; and had I a thousand tongues, a thousand hearts, I could not feel more deeply, such is her spell on me. She, on her part, is enchanted by me, and her ardour is as mine; and we are sworn one to the other by like vows. But much time has passed and I have not seen her, for I cannot go without a pretext to the Cadi's house; accordingly, this beautiful young woman has lost her wits through her devotion to me. By this or that means I must go and talk for a moment with her, solacing my own heart and giving joy to her."

Then the azas-bashi said :

"But, my lovely one, what are your intentions in such a matter? What stratagem do you count on for the fulfilment of your wishes?"

"I count on you to find a means whereby I can enter the Cadi's house," she said.

"But how can I do that?"

"Surely you can light on some ruse to help me to her?"

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“ Whatsoever you think of attempting to this end, know that I am ready to lend you what aid I can.”

“ To-night,” she said, “ after having decked myself in my most beautiful silks, I will go and seat myself near to the Cadi’s house ; then you will come with your chief, the assistant commissary, approaching me, asking me why I am seated there.

“ ‘ To-day,’ I will answer, ‘ I left the citadel for a certain purpose and I went into the town ; and, having seen to my affairs, I found myself belated ; for when I returned to the citadel, the gates were closed. Then I descended again to the town ; but I was not able to discover any of my acquaintances. Then I enquired where I might find shelter for the night ; and I was told to address myself to the Cadi of this quarter. I am trusting to him, hoping he may direct me to a suitable place ; and at dawn I shall return to my home. Happily for me, you come at the moment my embarrassment has reached a summit.’

“ Your chief, seeing my rich clothing, will say :

“ ‘ It is impossible to leave so young and so beautiful a woman in the road, covered as she is with jewels and pearls ; for she may be despoiled by some thief, or even killed with the intention of robbing her. If such a thing should happen, the Sultan will hear of it and we shall get into trouble. Let us set a guard

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near to this young woman for her protection till morning ; or, better still, let us find some reliable person who will house her ; then she will be in safety for the night. Now, in all respects, she cannot be better placed than in the house of the Cadi of this district ; no other quarters are so secure, so let us take her to him.'

" In this way your chief will have me taken to the Cadi's house, and there I shall win the desire of my heart, reunited to the Cadi's daughter. There ! surely that is the best course to pursue."

Now the azas-bashi answered :

" Your instructions are perfectly clear."

They separated, having come to this agreement, and went their several ways.

Night drew near, the hour of rest, then the hour of evening prayer ; and by and by the azas-bashi and his officer left their quarters and began to make their rounds together, continuing their way through the city from district to district ; and presently they reached the neighbourhood of the aforementioned Cadi's house. Here an odour of musk and ambergris assailed their senses.

" What a sweet scent," they said to each other, " and whence does it come ? "

And they looked to the right and to the left, hoping to discover the cause.

" Go see if you can find the source of this perfume," the officer said.

Straightway the azas-bashi advanced to the

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fore and noticed a beautiful young woman clothed in damask and brocade of gold, and listening. He drew near to her and, feigning ignorance, spoke to her, saying :

“ Lady, and who are you ? Why are you waiting here in your beauty, decked as I see you, all alone, at this hour ? ”

At these words she gave the answer already agreed upon. He returned to the officer and said to him :

“ Brother, there sits a young woman richly clothed and decked with precious jewels. She lives in the citadel ; and having come to the town to-day for some affair, she found herself belated, and at her return the gates were locked in face of her.”

The beard of the officer was grey and the beard of the azas-bashi black ; and after reflection the latter began to speak again, saying :

“ My good master, we must not leave the woman out of doors, and she without friends in this place. I cannot think of a more secure shelter for her than the house of the Cadi of this district, unless we set a guard to protect her until morning. But even so, some ill fellow might have designs on her person or her jewels, and he might kill her. If the Sultan hears of such an outrage, his anger will fall on us, and we shall find ourselves in trouble. Assuredly we can house her with some good folk for the night, then she can return to her home to-morrow at dawn.”

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“ Well, well,” the officer answered, “ do as you wish ; take the woman, lead her to your own house, be hospitable to her for this night ; then, in the morning, she will leave you.”

“ May Allah preserve me ! ” the azas-bashi said, “ there is no safety for her in my house ; or rather, I should say, she will be not so safe with me as in the Cadi’s house ; which, you see, is directly in front of us. If we place her there with her riches and her precious jewels, no one will be able to reproach us, whatsoever may happen.”

The officer agreed to take the advice of his underling, and away they went to rap on the Cadi’s door.

Instantly a servant came in answer, they confided the lady to his care ; and he shut the door and led her within. The azas-bashi and the officer continued on their rounds, and then went home.

Night was fading like an enemy vanquished before the glow of the rising sun, as the orators have it ; and at that hour the azas-bashi betook himself, as usual, to the officer’s house.

The first object to meet his glance was the Cadi ; who, in a fury, railed at the officer, shouting :

“ You brought a baggage to my house for shelter ! She has robbed my cash-box in the night, and stolen six thousand florins, my entire fortune. She broke into the box, took the whole lot, and off she went with it. Now you

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must find her, otherwise I shall make plaint against you to the Sultan. ”

Then he turned on the azas-bashi and stared at him, saying :

“ You know this woman, and so you shall recover my money for me.”

At this command the azas-bashi was exceedingly troubled ; nor could he utter a word in his astonishment, his surprise and despair.

Meanwhile the Cadi repeated his demand.

The the azas-bashi said :

“ In truth I never heard of such a thing in the days of my life ; and the only course left to us is to search diligently for the woman.”

The Cadi remained silent ; and the azas-bashi went on :

“ If the affair has happened in this way, your worship, then it was inevitable ; for what is doomed to happen, must happen. Grant us a few days delay, meanwhile we will see if we can or can not discover something about your thief ; then you will be able to fulfil your threat. Give us three days ; and, according to our finding or not finding the lady, you can make your plaint to the Sultan.”

The Cadi granted the respite demanded ; and the azas-bashi left the quarters of his chief at once and went home, deep in reflection. Then he set himself to forage in the city, road by road, district by district, and from door to door in his quest for the woman concerned, thus exploring the whole of Cairo, chokeful of

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indignation and anger, raging against his lack of foresight, cursing his simplicity.

Two days passed without his having discovered any trace or indication whatsoever of the woman, or anything about her or her dwelling-place.

On the third day, our azas-bashi continued the search, in the meantime saying to himself reproachfully :

“ Indeed, I must have become a regular ninny, since I cannot succeed in bringing anything to light about the woman, although I know her by sight. It is most curious that everyone I question should know nothing at all about her. Nevertheless I cannot run the whole universe like a vagabond ; and so, unquestionably, I must devise some stratagem whereby I can put hand on the creature.”

However, Providence rules all things, and the azas-bashi, aware that the time allowed to him was about to expire, yet pursued his way, suffering the most irksome disquiet. Then, by chance he entered the road where dwelt the woman for whom he had been searching vainly during three days.

She was actually standing at her window, engaged in watching the passers-by.

She saw the azas-bashi ; who, deep in his misery, trudged on, his head down. She withdrew from the window in haste ; but, even as she she did so, a thought perched in her mind. She said to herself :

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“Now here is a lovely opportunity of proving to that booby how clever I am as a trickster. And since I put him in a pickle, it is for me to have him out.”

At this moment the azas-bashi passed beneath her window ; and she, seeing his advance, burst out laughing. At this sound he raised his head, saying to himself :

“Who is this woman, laughing in such fashion ? ”

He did not turn his glance from her.

She signed to him to enter the house ; and he was yet more astonished, adding to himself :

“What can she want with me ? Why does she call to me ? Here is a mystery. I must see what it means, and what is to be the result.”

He went into the house, noticed a vast staircase, and, on a landing above, a woman of elegant appearance ; who invited him to ascend. He climbed the first flight and drew near to her ; and she took him by the hand, urged him to seat himself in the place of honour, and enquired about his health. The azas-bashi, meanwhile, could not recognise her, for she was veiled.

“Pardon me, my most dear lady,” he said to her, “but I do not seem to know you, so tell me who you are.”

“I am the lady for whom you sought shelter at the Cadi’s house,” she answered.

“Ah, Madam ! you landed me there in a dreadful hobble ; and now I am on the verge of

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an abyss, and faith ! I well deserve to be sent flying."

" But since you are an azas-bashi in a city famed for its valour, how can you be troubled to such a pitch in an affair of this sort ? For two days I have seen you trudging up and down, lost in thought ; and I only heard this morning that the Cadi has given you three days in which to discover my whereabouts, and that otherwise he will make fact of his threats. I have taken compassion on you. I said to myself : ' It is easy to save him from disgrace.' And it was solely in order to give you such means that I made a sign to you."

Then the azas-bashi said :

" What is your design ? The third day is almost at an end, and I must go to report to my chief. Certainly there will be no pity for me, and so they will fulfil their threats. What can you do in face of this, and how do you intend to save me from the Cadi ? Tell me, in short, what you think of it."

" My plan is quite complete, and easy to accomplish," she answered. " Be tranquil ; no evil need befall you. Drive all fear from your mind ; for the Cadi will not have you put to death, since there will be no reason why he should."

At these words she took the azas-bashi by the hand and led him to a room containing two chests stored with rubies and other precious stones and valuable things ; and these she

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showed to him. And he was dumbfounded at the sight. Then she opened yet another chest and set in it front of the azas-bashi; and it proved to be full of gold.

“What does this mean?” he said to her.

“Know that I have not the least interest in the Cadi’s daughter,” she answered; “but only in his gold. Here is the purse taken from his cash-box, and it holds six thousand golden florins. When you gained hospitality for me in his house, it was as if you had told me to take the gold and carry it away. I am possessed of great riches, and I spend without forethought and in accord with my whims. To say truth, what I desire is to win your heart. My sole longing is that you will offer your heart to me in exchange for mine. You would have wasted a thousand years without discovering me, had I not determined otherwise. When I saw you, I appeared to you of my own free will; and in order to gain your heart, I made myself known to you by giving you a purse of gold. And such is the motive wherefore I have made myself known to you again just now.”

Then the azas-bashi said :

“Alas, Madam ! I want neither these riches nor these jewels ; and may they bring happiness to you ! But who can help me out of my difficulties ? If there are any means of saving me, for pity’s sake tell me.”

“Indeed this does not distress me,” she answered.

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“ But me ! it distresses me greatly. Here the third day draws to an end, and I cannot see any means of escaping from danger. Now if there is a way, tell me what I must do.”

“ I have already said that nothing could be easier. When night falls, go and find the Cadi and your chief. Undoubtedly they will heap reproaches on you. Do not answer, no matter what the Cadi may say. Then, certainly your chief will speak to you, demanding why you are silent and why you ignore the Cadi. And you will say finally :

“ ‘ Well, and why should I answer him ? The Cadi is an august personage, and everyone is at his beck ; and I am only a poor devil. But if you will hear me and give me your favour, my most honourable chief, then I will speak, justifying myself to the full ! ’

“ Then, in the presence of the Cadi, your chief will say to you forthwith :

“ ‘ Explain yourself at once, and if you are afraid to speak to the Cadi, then speak to me.’

“ You will answer :

“ ‘ This is what I have to say. Recently, at night, I found shelter for a woman at the house of his worship the Cadi. He has told us that there he had more than six thousand pieces of gold. This woman never came out of that house, because no one has been able to find either sign or trace of her, nor has anyone heard news of her. His worship the Cadi came to

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tell us that she had stolen six thousand pieces of gold from him ; anyhow, that was what he said. It may be, perchance, that the woman in this puzzling affair has suffered some outrage : therefore it will be profitable to search the house of his worship the Cadi, so to find out if anyone has discovered some trace of this woman ; that is, to make sure whether my supposition is or is not true.'

"At these words, the Cadi will no doubt rouse himself, calling on all his household gods. Then he will say to you :

" ' Go to my home. I will remain here whilst your chief and my deputy accompany you ; then we shall see if you dare to persist in your suggestions.'

"You will make strict search in the house, and you will find nothing ; then you must begin to lament, pitying yourself, exonerating yourself. When you are about to leave, open the door that leads to the inner court of the guard, and there you will see a well. Spy into it with care and attention, like a huntsman in search of prey. Then you will say :

" ' Wait a moment, wait ! I can see something down there ! '

"Then you will call to your chief and the Cadi's man and to the rest of them in a loud voice. Now the depth of the well is not great, and with the help of a pole you will fish up a bundle of clothes. And inside you will find my mantle, my trousers, my fine linen, all blood

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bespattered. By and by, when you present these things to the Cadi, you must say :

“ ‘What does this mean, and how can you account for it? Now you see whether your accusations are just, and whether your word is worth more than mine ; now it is easy to compare one with the other.’ ”

The azas-bashi, hearing these words, understood the lady's plan, and approved, considering himself out of danger ; and he was amazed. However, he quickly decided to do her bidding.

When he was preparing to leave her, she said to him :

“ Carry this purse away with you.”

“ Since you have taken me into your favour,” he answered, “ keep this purse to yourself and it shall be a pledge from me. Once my affairs with the Cadi are settled, I will return to you and I will marry you.”

Thus the azas-bashi spoke in his innocence.

Then the lady said :

“ So be it ; and in truth, from this moment, all that belongs to you is mine, and all I have is yours.”

By her words she gained entire possession of her naive auditor's heart, and he was overjoyed ; and so made ready to go from her, begging her to spare herself the trouble of seeing him on his way.

Now at this moment the lady remembered the three hundred pieces of gold she had given to him formerly ; and she said :

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"If you find yourself in need of money, come to me. You shall have as much gold as you want."

The azas-bashi, hearing this, produced the pieces of gold in his pleasure, gave them back to the lady, and went home to bed.

And when dawn broke and the sun rose, he left his house and went to see his chief; with whom he found the Cadi, seated.

The Cadi said to the officer :

"Here is the fellow who will give us news of my money, and will tell us what has happened to it."

At once he questioned the azas-bashi; who recalled the instructions of the lady, and was mute. This infuriated the Cadi.

"Why, the fellow has nothing to say!" he shouted. "So this is the way he treats me! Very well then! I am off to tell the whole story to the Sultan, and we shall see what he makes of it."

Then the officer said to the azas-bashi :

"Why cannot you answer his worship the Cadi when he speaks to you?"

"I do not answer him," the azas-bashi said, "because my words can have no value in relation to those of his worship; for he is angry with me, and my condition is inferior to his. How dare I utter a word in his presence, no matter what truth might be in me?"

At this the Cadi was infuriated anew.

"You bird of ill-omen!" he shouted. "Now say what you have to say!"

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Then the azas-bashi answered :

“ Three days ago, in the evening, I led a woman to the house of his worship the Cadi. And he chanced to have several thousand pieces of gold. From that time no one has been able to find out the name or the rank of this woman ; no one has given any news of her. Probably somebody has murdered her, in order to rob her ; and perhaps we shall be able to discover traces of her in the house of his worship the Cadi.”

The Cadi, on hearing the remarks of the azas-bashi, fell into such a rage that he reminded one of a red-hot cauldron suddenly drenched with cold water. In his fury he protested against such fraudulent accusations, shouting :

“ What ! you dare to say such things against me ! Either you are a liar or I am a liar. But know that I never lie ! Away you go to my house, and if no one can find any trace of this woman, then your lie will be exploded, you will be fully responsible, and the truth of my words will be clear to all. Off you go to my house,” he added, “ and search where you will.”

“ I refuse to go alone,” the azas-bashi said. “ Let my chief and your man and others of the sort come with me and help in the search.”

The Cadi returned to his house with the azas-bashi, his chief and the Cadi's man, and two or three men of the guard who happened to be nearby. And they all passed into the house and

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searched from top to bottom without discovering any sign of the woman.

Now the azas-bashi pretended to be ashamed, and he excused himself to the Cadi, and humbled himself before him. And the Cadi, taking profit from the event, said to him :

“ There now, you scoundrel ! Your lies are proven. What becomes of your foul accusations ? ”

Then he overwhelmed him with insults and injuries.

Meanwhile his men and the officer and the assistants were preparing to leave the house, asking that the door should be opened ; whereupon the azas-bashi, having forgotten no instruction from the lady, began to forage here and there with much caution, like a hunter in search of game. And he called to the others, saying :

“ Come here ! There is something here ! What can it be ? ”

At these words they drew near to him.

“ Why,” the Cadi said, “ this is the well.”

The azas-bashi, without delay, seized a pole, leaned over the edge of the well, and, at the first attempt, fished up a bundle. He opened it promptly, and in sight of the others, and discovered the woman's clothes soaked with blood : a veil, a handkerchief, a mantle, trousers, leathern slippers, a cap, and other things of the sort.

Then the azas-bashi made the most of his

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opportunity, and he cried out loudly in his joy.

"Your worship," he said to the Cadi, "have I lied or have I spoken truth? Allah be praised! Here am I justified in the presence of everybody. And you, made a Cadi by our Sultan, are *you* endowed with all the virtues! What! you with your riches, and you give shelter to a poor woman in order to betray her! That is a monstrous thing, and it shall be my duty to inform our illustrious monarch. If we try to hide it from him, from whom nothing can be hidden, he will learn the truth elsewhere, and I shall loose my head: for his orders cannot be violated."

The unfortunate Cadi could make nothing at all of the facts; and in his distress and his agony he remained as motionless as a dead tree; and night was at his heart and he knew not how to distinguish the true from the false.

Now the azas-bashi's chief began to speak, saying:

"Here is a mystery, and no one can see through it nor make anything of it."

At these words the Cadi's man rose and went away, followed by the other men; and, once out from the house, they spoke of the things they had seen, each one differing in opinion from the rest.

The Cadi, alone with the azas-bashi and his chief, loaded them with compliments and attentions and presents. Then he said:

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“ I shall be greatly relieved if some one will expose to me the origin of the trick at the heart of this business.”

Then he began again to make a fuss of them : but neither the azas-bashi nor his chief spoke a word, refusing to be drawn ; and together they left the house and returned to their homes.

And so the azas-bashi, by the cunning of the lady, escaped from the clutch of the Cadi ; who had been robbed by her of a considerable sum, and who permanently lost his reputation among the people.

And the azas-bashi and his chief, having returned to their homes, rested in quiet.

When three days had passed, the azas-bashi appeared in public, intent to arrange the promised marriage with his lady. He went straightway to her house, and rapped on the door : but no one answered him.

Then he addressed himself to a neighbour, saying :

“ Is it long since the lady who lives here left the place ? ”

He learned that the folk had gone from the house, and it was now vacant ; that recently a woman had been in possession, having lived there upwards of a week ; and that three days ago she had departed ; nor did anyone know whom she might be nor what had become of her.


Thus informed, the azas-bashi realised his own stupidity ; and he sighed as he thought that

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this woman had made game of him also. He was absorbed by her and spent the whole night in quest of her, but vainly. Then he went home, discomforted and sorrowing, bewildered by the wiles of the woman, and his own credulity.

Chapter Three

Samson and Delilah

ONG AGO, in the days of the Israelites, there lived a saintly man, who spent his time fasting and watching by night. Often he prayed in the synagogue, and he was austere in his habits. Countless months passed for him in this fashion. He was a true soldier of the Lord.

He had the meekness of a camel, and, whilst he strove, his belly was empty like the camel's, for he nourished himself on the joys of paradise; and the waters of immortality, the water of life, moistened his lips and refreshed his palate, and the delectable rivers of Truth slaked his thirst.

As we have said, he passed countless months living thus, and his fastings and his austerities and his privations were equal to the death of so many infidels killed in warfare, though he had neither smitten nor vanquished anyone directly, because his feeble hands were unable to support the weight of a battle-axe or of a sword.

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The venerable name of this pious, ascetic man was Simeon ; and (Heaven be praised and exalted !) he knew his prayers were acceptable and answered.

Now certain infidels designed to make prisoner of this feeble recluse ; and they said among themselves :

“ We cannot overpower Simeon by force and without pretext. What ruse can we employ in order to take possession of him ? ”

They passed several days in consultation, and could find no other means but the following :

Simeon had for wife a woman of rare beauty ; indeed her beauty and charms were such that folk regarded her as a second Zuleika.¹ Simeon, in the depth of his affection for her, granted her desires always and at the first request. And the infidels, aware of this fact, decided to overwhelm her with presents as a sure means of persuading her to bind Simeon with cords on a night when he should be sleeping beside her ; and so he would be delivered into their hands, and they could put him to death and be rid of him.

Forthwith several of the infidels were sent to this woman ; and they said to her :

“ Beautiful one, can you tell why we have come to you thus ? ”

“ I cannot tell,” she answered, “ so instruct me.”

They disclosed their plan to her, adding :

¹ The name of Potiphar's wife.

SAMSON AND DELILAH

“ We will give you such presents and jewels, and you will be as rich as a queen ! ”

In this way they dazzled her with promises, and gained sway over her heart.

She said to them :

“ I agree to warn you when the hour comes.”

Then they left her, content with their success.

Now Simeon continued to devote himself to his austerities ; and eventually he grew weary, went into the house, took to his bed and fell asleep. Immediately the naughty woman drew near to the saintly man as he slept, and she bound his legs and his arms with stout cords.

Presently Simeon awakened, saw that he was bound, and assumed that only his wife could have so dealt with him.

“ Who has bound me in this fashion ? ” he said to her.

“ I have,” she answered. “ I wanted to test your might.”

At these words Simeon invoked the name of God, exerted himself, and delivered himself from his bonds.

And once more days passed and Simeon continued his practice (that is by penitence) in his war against the infidels ; and once more he felt fatigue and took to his bed and slept.

Then his treacherous wife, without further delay, bound his legs and his arms ; but now she used iron chains. And when he awakened

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he felt himself strangled ; and he questioned his wife, saying :

“ Only you can have chained me in this fashion.”

“ Yes,” she answered, “ I wanted to see if you had enough power to break even these things.”

“ This is foolishness,” he said ; “ for no bonds can hold me whilst there is hair on my head.”

She did not answer ; but she stored these words in her mind. Simeon invoked the name of God, shook the chains that entangled him, and broke them.

Once again he passed several days in pious exercise, and then went into his house and fell asleep. His faithless wife took advantage of his state, cut hair from his head, and bound him.

When he awakened, he questioned her yet again, and she said that she wanted to know if his might actually lay in the hairs of his head.

“ If my hairs are cut,” he said, “ power flies from my limbs. More than once you have tested that power, such as it was ; now, in taking my hair, you have taken my strength from me.”

When his wife saw him so enfeebled, she left the house, intending to warn those infidels who were at watch in the vicinity, meaning to return with them. And the wicked woman joined them, telling the facts to them. They ran, burst into the house of the saintly man, saw

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that he lay bound in chains ; and with violence they haled him before the King.

This tyrant forthwith made them slice the nose and the ears of the saintly man ; then they plucked the eyes from the head of the worshipful and noble martyr. Finally they broke his arms and his legs, so that henceforth he could neither strike nor pursue the infidels in righteous war.

While they were torturing him in this manner, his perfidious wife gave neither sign of pity nor of sorrow for him ; and she witnessed the whole scene with dry eyes.

Then a voice was heard saying :

“ My servant, have you no prayers to make to Me, so that you shall be cured ? ”

And Simeon cried out :

“ Master, grant strength to me once again, that I may destroy these infidels.”

And at that moment the power returned to all his limbs and they were as if no outrage had been done to them ; and he felt himself filled anew with his old strength.

Now the infidels were gathered in a building open on all sides and having support from a central column ; and the saintly man had been fastened to this very column during his torture. He called on the name of God, and in a single effort, hurled the column to earth ; and the building fell into ruin, and, in the fall, the infidels and the villanous woman were crushed, so that not one escaped.

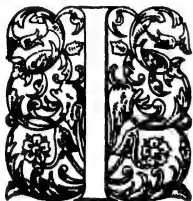
Now, ladies, you see what happens to those of you who show neither pity nor sorrow.

Throughout his life the saintly man had loved his wife in despite of all things ; yet he had received no contentment from her. She delivered her husband to his enemies and showed no pity for him. Hence, by force of circumstance, he lost his affection for her ; and he in his turn showed no pity for her.

Certain it is that fidelity is no attribute of woman : it is an illusion, not to be trusted. Indeed, there are three things of this world wherein 'tis perilous to put one's trust : a woman, a sword, and a horse. And with this we will end our tale.

Chapter Four

The Double Miracle of the Wise Man

N THE time of the venerable Wise Man (may the blessing of God be with him!), a young Israelite lived in piety and abstinence; and his days and his nights were spent in prayer and devout exercise, and he was an example of spiritual edification to all his fellows.

His uncle had a daughter, who likewise followed the way of faith; and her chastity was such that never had she allowed herself to be looked on by any man either young or old; nor had anyone a more established and durable reputation for piety and virtue.

Fate willed that one day her cousin had sight of her face.

Now at this vision of beauty he became madly infatuated, having no time for reflection; and his heart and soul were conquered by his love for her, and all other things were indifferent to him in his passion, and he lost his wits and a sense of himself in one incessant, all-devouring thought.

THE WILES OF WOMEN

By and by he determined to send to his uncle, praying that he might be allowed to marry the object of his passion, declaring his readiness to make such nuptial gifts as might be demanded from him.

In this way the beauty was given to him ; and, the wedding having taken place, the husband led his wife to his house.

When they were together under the same bed-cover, he said to her :

“ My cousin, why will you not submit to my wishes ? Is there anything you want from me ? Speak, my beloved, my beautiful queen.”

“ I long to seal a compact with you,” she said. “ If I die first, see that no one but yourself rests above me, and set no other woman near to me. If you do not grant my request in this matter, I shall never be able to meditate on the Most High, and indeed I should prefer to be separated from you ! ”

As might well be imagined, the husband decided to accede to her demand rather than to go fasting. Therefore he gave pledge to her ; and she, on her part, did not further resist him.

When they had lived together for a year and a month, it pleased Heaven that she should die. Her husband performed all the ablutions needful ; then she was carried to the burial-ground. He refused to leave her tomb ; and there he bemoaned her and lamented for a space of two whole years. He fulfilled his promise to her, covering with his body the place where his

THE DOUBLE MIRACLE

dead wife lay, and there was no surcease to his grief, and day and night his tears continued to moisten the stones of her tomb.

"Oh, my dear wife!" he moaned, "no one can be likened to you; for, though you were a wife, you remained as frank as a young girl!"

His kinsmen gathered around him and remonstrated with him on his conduct; and without avail. Day by day he was yet more deeply involved in his sorrow and pain. And gradually his flesh thinned on him so that he looked as yellow as the finger of a skeleton; and folk might have said he was about to give up the ghost.

One day, it chanced that the venerable Wise Man (all hail to him!) was passing by the burial-ground as he went on his way; and he entered. He could hear groans and, in search of the cause, he noticed a man, young and in great sorrow, whose tears flowed without pause and whose cries reached to the heavens. The venerable Wise Man drew near to him, gave greeting, and questioned him on the wherefore of his misery. Then the inconsolable husband told the tale of his sorrows.

And the saintly man said to him:

"Rise up and rid yourself of these black moods; for this is a poor way of keeping a vow."

The husband made no movement.

"Rise up," the Wise Man said again; "for I have made my prayer to the Most High, and

THE WILES OF WOMEN

He in His might has taken pity on your grief."

Now the unfortunate husband recovered his wits, and flung himself in supplication at the feet of the Wise Man ; who had compassion and lifted his hands and began to pray.

All at once, and by the grace of Heaven, the dead wife rose from the earth and came from her tomb. And the husband at sight of her cried out in his amazement.

Then he said to her :

" Oh my beloved ! I cannot lead you to the house, naked as you are ; therefore let me run home and return with raiment for you."

And at these words he went away, leaving her as she was.

The Wise Man continued on his way, pursuing his affairs.

Now at this time an amiable young man lived with the tribes of Israel ; and he was famous among his fellows for his dazzling beauty.

As he passed near to the burial-ground, on a sudden he noticed an unclothed woman as she sat on the edge of a tomb. And he said to himself that never before had anyone seen such charms ; and he gave thanks to the Most High, to the benevolent Lord and all-powerful Master, who had made so enchanting a creature.

Indeed, at the first glance he was ravished by a thousand impulses of love, so that he seemed to be suffocating in the clamour of his heart ; and he stood spellbound as he looked at her.

THE DOUBLE MIRACLE

However, he resolved to approach her; and he gave greeting in words most alluring, saying:

"My beautiful one, in the name of the All Powerful and Most High, tell me who can have forsaken you, leaving you thus in a burial-ground and at the edge of a tomb? Princess like to a nymph of Paradise, what ruthless villain has left you alone in this state? Has he no fear of the Almighty One? If it is your pleasure I will lead you to my house; and if God permits, we can become husband and wife."

She regarded him attentively as he talked to her; and she saw that he was gracious, and felt herself drawn to him even as he to her, such feelings being more effective than all the prayers ever uttered.

"My dear Master," she said to him, "how can I go with you in this state? Therefore find a means of procuring raiment for me; and then we shall soon be united one to the other."

As he heard and understood her and appraised her attitude towards him, he rejoiced exceedingly and, without pause, took his cloak from his shoulders and enwrapped her and led her away in haste.

When they had continued for a little time, they came face to face with the husband. And he, seeing them so disposed, said to her:

"My cousin, whither are you going in this manner? I left you only a short while ago, and here I meet you, and there is a change in you, and you are wearing this fellow's cloak.

THE WILES OF WOMEN

Verily I cannot make sense out of such a business. Alas, my beloved ! what is it you mean to do ? Remember the ties that unite us, and the pledge you forced on me. Heart of my heart ! my treasured one ! do you want to be the death of the man who has recalled you to life, or have you taken leave of your senses ? ”

She said to him :

“ My cousin and my dear Lord, if I made a pact with you as you say, it was valid only during our life together, and ceased accordingly at my death. It cannot be revived ; nor do I wish that it should be revived, now that I have arisen from the grave and am exempt from all ties. I have turned my fancy to the man you see here. I love him from the depth of my heart ; I am drawn to him by an inclination I cannot withstand. That is my answer.”

“ But think of my love for you, my cousin ! ” he said. “ Two whole years passed over me as I lay with my brow in the dust and wept on your tomb, despairing at loss of you ; and yet you behave to me in this way ! ”

He broke into sobs, adding :

“ No, you cannot forsake me thus ! ”

She had no ruth at sight of him ; and away she went with her new husband.

By and by, the venerable Wise Man (all hail to him !) stood in a pulpit, delivering his wisdom ; and the forsaken husband came to him. His face was bathed in his tears, and he said :

“ O prophet of the Most High ! my sorry fate

THE DOUBLE MIRACLE

has become direful. My cousin has gone from me, and without a moment's hesitation, choosing another, abandoning me to my loneliness. Take pity on me, and pray to the Most High that He may draw her to Himself again."

Then the venerable Wise Man raised his hands and made his prayer. And it pleased Heaven to grant that prayer, and to reduce the woman to her former state. Then the husband, without loss of time, carried her to the tomb and buried her once more.

And from that day he knew that there was no constancy in women, no fidelity to a promise given; and he took the way of wisdom, freeing himself from the passions of men and withdrawing into his own corner. And when he chanced to meet his fellows, he bent his outward ear to their advice and counsel; but in his own haunts he gave himself up to prayer and good works, and in his wisdom he served as an example to others. No further desires harassed him; for he had liberated himself from the most powerful of all desires, that provoked by women; and thenceforth he held women in aversion, having lost trust in them.

Chapter Five

The Three Wishes

FIRST VERSION

FORMERLY, a just man named Salyh lived among the Israelites. And one day while he was resting, he heard a voice saying: "My servant, I will grant you three wishes, no matter whatsoever they may be."

This was repeated several times.

Now Salyh's wife chanced to be in the house; and she too heard the voice, and determined to profit thereby.

She gave herself to meditation, then sought her husband.

"My dear friend," she said to him, "since it is granted to you to make three wishes, why not ask that you may become more lusty?"

The husband expressed this wish; and promptly it was given to him. Forthwith, thus armed, he returned to his wife. But they were not happy.

Then she besought him to wish yet again, this time that his strength should be somewhat abated. He obeyed his wife; and promptly his wish was granted to him.

THE WILES OF WOMEN

At this second accomplishment, the wife was not yet content.

“Oh, my beloved,” she said to him, “since there is a third wish owing to you, beg that you may be as you were before hearing the voice.”

He did as she bade him, and was rendered to his former state.

So it befell that his three wishes availed him nothing.

Here is an example of the foolishness of women ; therefore take care that you do not give ear to them, and that you are not swayed by them ; and so it shall be well with you.

SECOND VERSION

IN THE time of the prophet Daniel (may he be preserved and blessed !), there lived a just man named Salyh.

One day, as he was at his prayers, he heard a voice saying :

“Salyh, my servant, I am ready to grant and to fulfil three of your prayers, no matter what you may ask.”

The wife of Salyh also heard the voice ; and, in her lowliness, and full of respect, she came to her husband and said to him :

“My dear Lord, I beg you to make prayer for me, so that I may become more beautiful than any other woman in the world.”

THE THREE WISHES

He did as she bade him; and to his great amazement, his wife became a new Zuleika, a second Balkis.¹

Some days passed; and she looked at herself in a mirror, saying to herself:

“My dear, you are as beautiful as it is possible to be; and of whom are you worthy, if not the Sultan himself?”

After having discoursed to herself in this fashion, she began to forsake her husband. Then he insisted that she should accomplish her wifely duties; but she freed herself from him and went to the door.

Soon the news of the existence of such a beauty reached the Sultan's ears; and he decreed that she should be separated from her husband; and he wedded her.

Salyh, having been patient for a time, made his second prayer, saying:

“Most High, I beseech now that this woman may become more hideous than any other living woman!”

Straightway the change demanded took place; and nothing more was needful to make the Sultan discard her and put her out of doors.

Then she repented, dressed herself in rags, unbound her hair, and covered her head with ashes; and she came and stood at the door of her first husband. He could do no less than make his third prayer to the Most High,

¹ The Oriental name for the Queen of Sheba.

THE WILES OF WOMEN

wherefore his wife might be transformed to her first condition.

Hence none of his three prayers were of any use to him.

When a woman overhears words of import, trouble is bound to ensue.

Chapter Six

The Insulted Judge



YOUNG woman fell in love with a young man ; and one day she said to him :
“ I love you, and if it shall please Heaven, we will marry ; but I cannot be wife to you unless, beforehand, you agree to three conditions.”

“ And what are they ? ” he asked.

“ You must drink no coffee, you must eat no water-melon, and you must abstain from sitting on anything made of marble.”

The young man gave his earnest pledge, the marriage took place, and the husband remained faithful to his word ; and the pair lived several years together in perfect accord and serenity.

One day he asked himself what, in effect, could be the meaning of the three precious conditions.

“ I must inquire into this,” he added to himself.

After some hesitation he climbed on to a block of marble and stayed there for an hour, then he ate a water-melon, and then he drank a cup of

THE WILES OF WOMEN

coffee; and this done, he returned to his home.

During the night, and by reason of the coffee, he was haunted by a dream; and he tried to draw near to his wife, but she thrust him from her and left the bed. Now he realised that the hussy knew the truth, and he repented of his doings and wondered by what means he could escape from the consequences, ready to seize the first that should present itself; but he could discover nothing whatsoever. He rose from her bed, and meditated on this and that, without avail.

Scarcely had dawn broken when his wife bestirred herself, covered herself with her mantle, and led her husband before the court; and together they stood in the presence of the Cadi.

"Your worship," she said, "your servant is bound in proper wedlock to this man you see before you. To begin with, I imposed three conditions on him; he accepted them, and fulfilled them during the several following years. Now he has broken his pledge. In accord with my right, I am come to you to demand a divorce; and I am resolved that after to-morrow I will be wife to him no longer."

The Cadi declared that he must know the conditions; and she named them to him.

"Yesterday," she added, "he climbed on to a block of marble, he ate a water-melon, and he drank coffee."

THE INSULTED JUDGE

"That is false," the husband said. "I have done nothing of the sort."

"Your worship," the plaintiff went on, knowing precisely the habits of her husband, "I can tell you all his doings in detail. He entered such and such a shop and ate his melon, which had been kept in fresh water ; at such and such a place stands the marble block on which he rested ; and at such and such a place he drank his coffee."

The Cadi was astonished at these words ; and, without reflection, he said to her :

"If you are so well-informed, it would become you to be merciful."

At this the wife was yet more angry.

The Cadi and his assistants urgently begged her to forgive her husband ; but she continued pitiless. Then the Cadi and the others, tired of the clamour, were content to ask that she would suspend her action, while reserving to herself the right to reflect on the circumstances, deciding whether in view of the unanimous prayers addressed to her it would not seem more gracious on her part to forego her claims.

"So be it," she said. "I agree to be reconciled to my husband, but not so unless his worship the Cadi gives answer to a riddle I will put to him."

"And what may that be?" the Cadi answered.

"From bone I become sinew, then flesh. Who am I?"

THE WILES OF WOMEN

The Cadi, stroke his beard and think as he might, sat mute. Finally he turned to the lady, saying :

“ At this moment I cannot light on the answer to such a riddle ; but return here to-morrow morning, when I shall have foraged in my books and can reply to you.”

On this, she withdrew.

And when night fell, the Cadi went home and had his supper served to him. Meanwhile the teasing question haunted his mind, and, as he took his food, he repeated to himself in an undertone :

“ ‘ From bone I become sinew, then flesh.’ . . . Never will any book enlighten me on that problem ! ”

His daughter, aged from sixteen to seventeen years, watched him, noticing his preoccupation, and how he stroked his beard as he talked to himself.

“ Father,” she said to him, “ you seem to be troubled. What is the matter ? ”

“ Nothing to do with little girls.”

“ Anyhow, tell me,” she answered, simpering.

Then he decided to tell her the riddle. And afterwards, she cried out :

“ Well, my faith ! there’s a pretty problem ! For vigour and resistance, a man from fifteen to thirty years may be compared to a bone, from thirty to sixty to a sinew ; and after sixty he is nothing better than a piece of flesh.”

At these words the Cadi was beside himself with delight. And he said :

THE INSULTED JUDGE

“What won’t I do tomorrow morning to shut the mouth of that devil of a woman !”

When it was barely day, he rose in his impatience and ran to the court. And after a considerable time the woman duly arrived and made salutation to him.

“Your worship,” she said craftily, “do you remember my riddle ?”

“Perfectly. Who is bone ?—the man from fifteen to thirty ; then he is sinew from thirty to sixty ; and finally, after sixty, he is only a piece of flesh.”

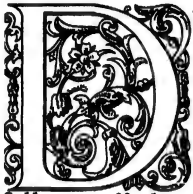
“Bravo, your worship ! I perceive you have a daughter more intelligent than yourself. Pray accept my compliments. She will get on in the world if she can solve riddles of this kind so aptly and readily ; for many seasoned women could do no better. There is likelihood of a great future for her, by reason of her admirable gifts.”

Thereupon she went from the court and left the Cadi as confounded and overwhelmed with confusion, and before all the folk, as Mehemet Shah when he too was left in face of his court after having mocked the poet.

PART TWO
PLEASURE AFTER PAIN

Chapter One

Dellé's Deceits

URING the reign of the Caliph Haroun-el-Raschid, there lived a wise astrologer; and one day a husband and his wife came to consult him.

“An amazing event has befallen us,” they said.

“And what is that?” the wise man asked.

“When I married this woman,” the husband answered, “I took her home; and we lived together for seven months. Then I was obliged to go on a journey. At the moment of my setting out, my wife said to me: ‘I believe I am with child, and that I shall be delivered by the time of your return.’ I commended her to Allah, and took to the road; and I returned without mishap after a four months’ absence. Now she is not yet delivered, though the child quickens within her; and I believe she is virtuous. We come to consult you in order that you may explain this delay to us.”

The wise man, having heard the facts, turned to his celestial globe, studied the horoscope—and said nothing.

PLEASURE AFTER PAIN

“What can you see?” they asked.

“In a little time a child will be born,” he answered, “and it will bring grief and woe to its mother. On the day of its birth it will have words and teeth; it will eat and drink, and be a sign of grave misfortunes to come; and the people will be filled with amazement. During the sixty years of its life, this creature will amass great riches; and finally, robbers will do murder and steal this wealth.”

The man and the wife went from him, greatly troubled.

A month passed and the husband died; and the wife followed him, dying in childbirth. The female infant thrived, undisturbed by her mother's death; and she took food, drank, walked and talked, to the utter astonishment of everybody. She grew in years and, when twenty, had great charm, could read wisely, and was as skilled in science as in vice. No one could look on her without a yearning to gain her favours.

The Money-changer Cozened

A YOUNG man of Khorassan fell in love with this lady, and besought her to marry him ; and she agreed, saying to him :

“ But if you would have me to wife, you must prove your worth ; for I am alike loth to excel you or to be excelled by you.”

“ Go to the bazaar to-morrow,” the young man of Khorassan answered, “ enwrap yourself in a cloak, and stand near to the chief money-changer ; then you will see what I am able to do.”

Accordingly, on the morrow, she betook herself to the appointed place ; and by and by the young man of Khorassan arrived, elegantly dressed and carrying a canvas bag attached to a cord.

He drew near to the chief money-changer and said to him :

“ Have you either gold of Magreb, Nishapour, or of Kashan ? ”

“ Yes,” the money-changer answered, “ and more ! ”

“ Then show Khorassanian gold to me.”

The money-changer seized a bag and opened it.

“ Here is the gold,” he said.

PLEASURE AFTER PAIN

Then the young man took up handfuls of money ; and he fastened his bag, sealed it, and placed it in front of him.

“ Why do you seal your bag ? ” the money-changer said in his surprise.

“ Is not this Khorassanian gold ? ” the other answered.

“ It is indeed,” the money-changer said ; “ and how much do you mean to pay me for it ? ”

“ Five-and-a-half gold pieces. Now what must I pay for gold of Magreb, Nishapour or Kashan ? ”

The money-changer seized the young man by the skirts of his robe, saying :

“ First return the Khorassanian gold to me. Are you no better than a thieving scamp, come to Bagdad to play your capers ? ”

The Khorassanian answered promptly :

“ Master, I came here to do business. What is the matter with you ? ”

A crowd gathered ; and now the money-changer tore his robe and scattered dust on his head and cried out :

“ He has my gold in his bag. He has stolen it from me, and he wants to make off with it ! ”

The young man said :

“ This man is mad. Here I was doing business with him ; and when I saw that we could not agree, I was about to leave him. I do not understand his complaints. The bag belongs to me, and is fastened with my seal, as you can see for yourselves.”

THE MONEY-CHANGER COZENED

While the young man spoke in this way, the money-changer continued to protest loudly ; and the folk said :

“ Let us take them to the Caliph.”

Now the Khorassanian, once in the presence of the Caliph, prostrated himself before this Prince of the Faithful, saying :

“ I am a merchant from Khorassan ; and before I left my fatherland, I turned my stock-in-trade into coin of the realm. This fellow showed gold to me, laying a trap whereby he might steal my money. I would not accept his offer, and I meant to leave him. That is all I know.”

Then the money-changer said :

“ The gold is mine.”

At once he named the means by which it had been filched from him.

The Caliph turned to the Khorassanian.

“ What is your answer to that ? ” he said.

Now, during the conversation with the money-changer, the young man had stolen part of the money within his reach, counting it as he did so ; and this same money, though not Khorassanian gold, he had sealed in his bag.

He said to the Caliph :

“ Most assuredly the money in question belongs to me, nor has it gone from my sight since I left home. I know it in its quality and its quantity. Will this money-changer agree that the gold belongs to me if I count it out before him, each piece according to its kind ? ”

PLEASURE AFTER PAIN

“ Yes,” the money-changer answered, “ certainly.”

“ Good ! ” the young man said. “ There are one hundred and one gold pieces and four halves, one hundred and three coins of Magreb, one hundred and ten of Kashan, and twenty from Nishapour.”

As he spoke thus, he opened his money-bag and set it before the Caliph. The contents were spread out, by order of the Prince, and counted, hence the statement of the Khorassanian was confirmed. Now the Caliph turned to him graciously, saying :

“ Of a surety, the gold is yours.”

He added :

“ Take away this money-changer.”

Then, in spite of the latter's prayers and supplications, he was sentenced to a fine of a thousand pieces of gold.

After the Khorassanian had given evidence of his wisdom in this manner, the young woman of whom we have spoken, her name being Dellé, consented to become his wife ; and her spouse, Mouhtat¹ by name, was extremely rich ; and they disputed the prize for cunning and treachery one against the other.

She presented him with three daughters, or rather, one might say, three female tricksters ; and together they formed a league for the subtly contrived swindling of Bagdad, in such sort that all and everyone had to be on the watch perpetually.

¹ Artful or intriguing.

THE MONEY-CHANGER COZENED

Dellé was in the habit of assuming the outward appearance of piety ; and she had a beggar's bowl suspended from her waist as she trudged along with a bundle on her back. In this guise she went knocking on the house-doors of old folk, saying when asked her business :

" I am a saintly woman, and I beg you in charity to shelter me so that I may say my prayers, for this is the hour ; nor shall I forget you when I pray."

Thus she made her way into all sorts of houses and was received with honour, being led to the place of prayer, where she made her *namaz*¹ ; and since she had instruction, she could intone a chapter from the Koran in an enchanting voice.

By this means she distracted the attention of the old folk and so helped her husband, her daughters and sons-in-law in their roguery ; they, in the meantime, having only to walk into the house and out again, after making a thorough pillage.

The people of Bagdad were finally exasperated, and they went with the full story to the Caliph.

¹ Compulsory prayer.

The Lover Robbed

ONE DAY, as Dellé ran the roads, she noticed a magnificent house. A vast doorway, enclosed only by a light curtain, gave entrance to it ; and the threshold was swept carefully, and watered often so that it might be kept fresh. Here a slave stood on guard.

Dellé glanced within and caught sight of a girl slave of exceeding great beauty and surrounded by servants ; and Dellé fancied herself in the presence of a nymph from Paradise. She drew near, made obeisance, seated herself and began to chant verses from the Koran.

The young lady left her couch, enraptured at sound of so rich a voice, and came to Dellé, making her compliments.

Suddenly Dellé began to sob.

“ What ails you, good mother ? ” the beautiful slave said to her.

“ Do you not recognise me, my beloved child ? ” Dellé answered. “ When you were yet an infant, I left you, going on pilgrimage to Mecca. Year after year I lived near the holy places ; and now at last I have returned.”

“ Indeed I do not know whom you may be,” the young lady said.

THE LOVER ROBBED

“ It was my duty to hold you in my lap ; and then I left your service and went on pilgrimage. I take Allah to witness ! ”

“ If you were my nurse, why do you remind me of it now ? ”

“ Because I remembered you the moment I caught sight of you ; and, so to speak, when I had lost all hope of ever seeing you again.”

“ And what do you want from me ? ”

Now Dellé rose and kissed the young lady's hand, and held it as she drew her aside, saying :

“ Would that I had never been a mother. Alas ! how shall I find strength to tell you what I want from you ? ”

Then she began to sob again, adding :

“ Indeed I shall never have the courage ! ”

Thereupon the young lady reassured her and comforted her

“ Well, well, my darling,” Dellé said, “ I vow to you that though I am rich and have great possessions, yet I am afflicted grievously. I have a son, eighteen years old ; and in all Bagdad there is no one comparable to him for beauty, fortune, wit and wisdom. He has seen you but once ; and the depth of his love for you is such that he dies of it. Have pity on him, consent to see him for a moment. Remember the saying that whosoever shall take pity on the sorrows of a believer shall himself obtain mercy. Put this truth to the test, no matter how reluctant you may be ; and then you can cherish the hope that Allah in his turn will grant your prayers.

PLEASURE AFTER PAIN

Do not scorn the supplications of this young man ; do not let him weep in vain."

Then the young lady said :

" Good mother, though I do not know of whom you speak, yet I feel touched at heart, if only because of your sore affliction on behalf of your son. Indeed I cannot refuse to let him look on me for a moment ; and if I so comfort him, I may hope to be rewarded by Heaven."

At these words she returned to her apartments, clothed herself in her most treasured raiment and decked herself with jewels of gold, diamond and pearls ; withal, she took a purse containing one hundred pieces of gold. Thus prepared, she came back to Dellé.

" Here I am at your service," she said.

" What trouble I cause you, my dear child ! " Dellé answered. " You deserve that I should give my life a thousand times for you. If it shall please Allah, opportunities may arise and I can prove my gratitude times without number."

At these words the young lady covered herself with an old *tchadir*¹ and left the house, preceded by Dellé, escaping without arousing the suspicions of the slave at the door, who took her for a servant charged with a commission.

They reached the bazaar ; and here a young and handsome wool merchant stood in front of his shop. Dellé said to her companion :

" Here is my son. He does not recognise

¹ A cloak of blue material worn by Persian women, and covering them from head to feet when they go to the city.

THE LOVER ROBBED

you clothed as you are ; so I will go and tell him of his good fortune."

Now Dellé advanced to the young merchant ; and after greeting him, she said :

" My son, a little time ago my daughter, a most alluring creature, caught sight of you ; and she was at once greatly taken with you. And she said to me : ' Go and tell him I long tirelessly for the moment when I might relish the joy of his company, if only for an instant ? ' Will you not take pity on this unhappy child ! I am an honest woman and I come to you thus, troubled for her, urged and constrained solely by her woeful plight. Three times I have made the holy pilgrimage, and my family is well known in Bagdad."

" At your service," the young man answered ; " do with me as you will."

Dellé then returned to fetch her supposed daughter, leading her to him.

The gallant rose to her, took the beauty by the hand, and conducted her to a small chamber above his shop. They sat down, one beside the other, exchanged warm words, and very soon wished to be happy together.

Dellé, having followed them, watched them ; for, had she remained in the shop alone, the merchant might have been suspicious.

At length the pair were well occupied, enraptured one with the other, their spirits mingling, wherefore Eblis¹ had his laugh ; and

¹ Satan.

PLEASURE AFTER PAIN

presently, weary in their joy, they fell asleep. Then Dellé snatched up stuffs, merchandise and money, in a trice, making no distinction between the merchant's and the young lady's cash ; and she bundled everything together, threw the pack over her shoulder, opened the door, since the key had been placed within, and made for home with all speed ; where, having accomplished her design, she rested.

Soon after the lovers awakened.

"Where is your mother ?" the gallant said to his lady.

"But is she not your mother ?"

"Certainly not," he answered. "On the contrary, she said you were her daughter."

They rose, astonished, terrified, suspecting some wile.

The young merchant ran to the door, descended to his shop, and found the place in disorder, rifled completely ; nor could he believe what he saw.

A crowd, hearing his cries, gathered at once ; and all were amazed and dumbfounded at the spectacle offered to them, saying among themselves :

"This is Dellé's work. . . . The young lady is blameless," they added when the whole affair had been explained to them ; and they discovered the old rags left by the fraudulent one in the room over the shop.

By and by, the hadjib¹ arrived ; and he took

¹ Police-lieutenant.

THE LOVER ROBBED

the young merchant with him, led him before the Caliph, and made him tell his adventure to that Prince. And the Caliph said to the hadjib:

“Undoubtedly this is a trick of Dellé’s.”

On a warrant from the Prince of the Faithful, the officer with his underlings and guard made search from house to house in Bagdad; but they could find no trace of the adventuress, and were obliged to make report, confessing their failure.

An Escape from Arrest

ONE DAY, in the bazaar, Dellé was recognised by a dyer, who stood in her way ; and he loaded her with reproaches and abused her at the top of his voice.

Dellé made no answer, remaining quite calm.

A crowd gathered ; whereupon our adventuress wept and moaned, and turned the whites of her eyes to Heaven, saying :

“ Alas, O Allah ! why have you troubled the mind of my son ? Why have you stricken him with madness instead of visiting your wrath on me ? ”

At this supplication the crowd seized the dyer and jostled him to such an extent that he lost consciousness. And when Dellé saw that he had recovered his senses, she said to him :

“ Calm yourself, my son.”

She began to sob again.

Now the crowd released the patient and begged his pretended mother to lead her son away.

“ But he is raging mad,” she said. “ He must go to the hospital for treatment, otherwise he will kill either himself or me.”

Immediately the crowd with one impulse flung themselves on him, bound him securely

AN ESCAPE FROM ARREST

and carried him off to the madhouse. Here, by means of an iron yoke attached to his middle, they secured him ; and they handed his garments and his turban to his mother. Dellé, once freed from him in this manner, slipped through the crowd, hurried away, and returned in peace to her home.

Day by day the keeper at the mad-house came to the poor dyer and beat him, and physicked him.

By and by, when much time had elapsed in this way, a friend of the unhappy man, walking near to the mad-house, caught sight of the dyer and so knew the state to which he had been reduced.

As may be easily imagined, the dyer appealed to his friend's compassion and gave account of his sufferings.

"This is Dellé's work," he added, "and I beseech you, find the hadjib, tell him of my wretched condition ; and he will make end to my torment."

The hadjib, on hearing the facts, came to release the dyer ; and he led him before the Caliph, to whom the dyer told his story in detail.

The Caliph smiled.

"Truly," he said, "this accursed woman has no equal in the world."

The Toothache

SOME time afterwards, as Dellé passed through the town, much preoccupied in mind, a donkey-driver recognised her; and he accosted her angrily.

"Young man," she said to him, "may Allah preserve you! Remember that I am only a feeble woman; and has anyone been in a more woeful plight?"

"Miserable hypocrite choked with deceit!" he said to her. "I have caught you, and I mean to hale you before the Caliph at once."

"My friend," she answered, "you shall do no such thing, for I will give money and a mule to you. Come to my house so that I may content you."

"Give me ten pieces of gold, together with the mule," he said, "and then, if need be, I am ready to maintain publicly that you are a woman worthy of all respect."

Dellé went on her way, and the donkey-driver followed, riding his beast. So they continued as far as the bazaar and near to a dentist's shop.

"This is where I live," she said, pointing to the door. "I will go in search of the mule and will lead it to you without delay."

THE TOOTHACHE

At these words, the donkey-driver prepared to wait for her.

She went into the shop, and said to the dentist:

"Master, you see that young man sitting on his donkey? He is my son. Such is the pain in his upper teeth that I fear it may drive him crazy; so I will pay you a piece of gold for every tooth you extract."

"Agreed," the simpleton answered.

Then, without pause, he made ready for his work, suspecting no dupery, uttering no further word to her. He motioned to his assistants; who, in a trice, pulled the donkey-driver from his ass, held him down, relieved him of seven teeth, and cauterised his jaw, applying olive oil.

At this sight, Dellé cried out:

"Take the blue sash he is wearing from him, or his blood will soil it."

Promptly they removed the sash and handed it to Dellé; who walked off with it after having paid the dentist.

As may be imagined, the patient had swooned during the operation. When he recovered consciousness, he gathered up his teeth and ran to find the hadjib to tell him of his sore adventure. The officer led him before the Caliph, to whom he narrated his tale anew; and the Caliph was bewildered. He could see no means of suppressing the old shrew by harsh methods, so he ordered that a notice should be published assuring her of pardon if she would come to him.

A Blind Man Made Useful

ONE day, as Dellé strolled in the town, she noticed a blind man clad in patched raiment and begging as he went on.

“Good people !” she said in a loud voice, approaching him, “Look at this man. He pretends to be destitute ; but he abuses your charity, for he has possessions, and a family.”

A crowd foregathered, wondering ; and Dellé continued :

“He is my husband and the father of my three daughters. One day he left the house, and with no cause whatsoever. Now I have found him, but he refuses to come home and live at peace. I beg you to help him by giving him your good counsel.”

And the crowd, thus instructed, began to admonish the poor fellow.

“Surely,” they said, “you ought to do as you are told. Why desert your family in this fashion, and without cause ? Why go begging ? Now be reasonable and do as you are told.”

And the blind man answered :

“But I have never possessed anything in the days of my life !”

“Nonsense !” Dellé said to him. “Your tales will not deceive me. But no matter ! We will

A BLIND MAN MADE USEFUL

go to the judge and have a deed drawn up so that I may be allowed to take what belongs to me. Then I shall be free from you. . . . You do not answer ; for you know well that always you refuse to do the proper thing ; always you wish to deny me my rights and my goods."

"What ! you blind old fellow," a wag in the crowd said, "a piece of good luck comes your way and you scorn it, though most folk search for it day and night ! Are you mad ?"

"But indeed I do not know this woman ! " the poor man answered.

"Do as you please," someone said, "though in my opinion you should first avoid poverty, and therefore all upbraiding."

"You know us as well as we know you," Dellé said to him. "Come along, and we will do the best we can for you."

The blind man had no answer to these words.

Dellé grasped his hand and led him in the direction of her home ; and before long the crowd ceased to follow them, and the pair reached the house without further incident.

Immediately the blind man had seated himself, a servant came with an ewer and washed his hands and his feet.

Dellé now pointed to him, saying to the younger of her daughters :

"Here is the father of you all. Go and kiss his hand."

At these words fear smote him ; and he said to himself :

PLEASURE AFTER PAIN

Once there, he entered the head-jeweller's shop, greeted the merchant, and sat down; meanwhile the servant remained standing behind him.

"I want two pomegranate-tinted rubies," the blind man said, "each the weight of one gold piece. Now what is the price?"

The jeweller opened his cases and passed the two gems to him.

"I want something better than this," the blind man said, fingering them.

Now the merchant sent his boy home to fetch two new stones.

At this moment a young man appeared, sent by Dellé; and he asked the blind man to return the fine raiment with which he had left her house. And the blind man removed his cloak and his elegant turban and gave them to the youth; who carried them back to the house of his mistress.

Presently the jeweller's boy returned with the expected rubies; which were handed to the blind man, and pleased him.

"What is the price?" he said.

"Not less than one thousand, one hundred pieces of gold."

"You shall have one thousand pieces of gold."

"It is a bargain," the jeweller answered.

Now the stones were given to the servant so that he might return and show them to his young mistress.

A BLIND MAN MADE USEFUL

This servant, however, was none other than Dellé herself; and she seized the jewels and disappeared.

On reaching home, she shut herself in, tranquil, content with the result of her stratagem.

Soon after, she burned the blind man's rags, as a precaution; and amongst the ashes she found five hundred pieces of Magreb gold.

The blind man, awaiting the servant's return, rested at ease on the cushions of a divan; and he fell asleep.

The jeweller, after waiting for some time, lost patience and aroused the blind man.

"Now, my friend!" he said, "and where is your house?"

"In truth I don't know; but when the boy returns he will tell you. As for me, I don't know at all in which direction it lies. He will be back in a minute."

The merchant was excited; and he said:

"But who is the boy?"

"I don't know."

At these words the merchant flung himself on the unfortunate man and grasped him by the throat.

'Rogue!' he shouted. "Have you no words but 'I don't know!'? Anyhow, you have defrauded me of a thousand pieces of gold!"

The blind man supposed this was a joke; and he said:

"Gently, gently! And I may tell you that

PLEASURE AFTER PAIN

I could produce five hundred pieces of money from my old clothes ! ”

“ Has anyone ever seen your old clothes or your gold, you hoary villain ! Do you think I would let a fellow like you trick me at will ? ”

The hadjib, hearing the wrangle, came on them. And the merchant told the facts to him, lamenting greatly. Then the blind man gave his version.

“ Yet another of Dellé’s cheateries,” the hadjib said ; “ and now the blind man is her dupe.”

Forthwith he led the pair before the Caliph ; to whom they alike told their adventures in detail.

Then the Caliph said :

“ The jeweller must release the blind man ; who, for his pains, met with Dellé. All that you can ask of me is to order that she shall be put to the torture. But to that end you must catch her first.”

The Disappointed Lover

ANOTHER time, Dellé, richly clothed and decked out with jewels, went to the bazaar, preceded by a servant carrying a purse ; and at a certain moment she sent him away, entered the shop of a famous merchant of woven stuffs, and greeted him.

“ Master,” she said, “ no doubt we shall be able to do business together. Show me the best of your goods.”

The merchant made no answer to a lady so assured, being content to display his wares before her. Dellé chose six lengths ; and, as she talked, she let her veil fall.

She took careful note that the merchant was disquieted at sight of her beauty. He allowed her to fold the selected tissues, however, and to give them to the shop-boy ; who stepped aside to make a parcel.

Suddenly the wily creature fell at the merchant’s feet ; and as she embraced his knees, she said :

“ Would to Allah I had a man such as you for husband ! ”

At these words the merchant was yet more troubled.

PLEASURE AFTER PAIN

"I have not always lived like a monk in the past!" he said.

"Well then," she answered, "why not pretend I am your wife?"

He gave sign of assent in response to her.

"All night I lay awake, thinking of brides," she said to him; "and now I am drowsy, nor shall I be at peace until we are together, and asleep."

"I share your feelings," the merchant answered, "therefore I will go to make preparation."

Now he sent his boy for cates and dainties; and he went to set his room in order, swept and garnished it; meanwhile Dellé remained alone in the shop.

Promptly she locked the door that led to the room where the merchant busied himself; and she seized everything she could carry, then went off in haste.

When the fond merchant had made ready the room, he came to the top of the stairs and invited the lady to join him. He received no answer, paused for a moment, called anew, and finally descended the stairs. But at sight of the locked door he cried out in his alarm. Folk ran to the shop, the door was opened; and he saw that he had been robbed. Then he groaned, saying:

"Good people! the woman you must have noticed as she came here has thoroughly pillaged my shop; and she has fled with stuffs worth a thousand pieces of gold!"

THE DISAPPOINTED LOVER

The commotion attracted a crowd from all parts of the bazaar ; but no one had seen the woman he named.

The hadjib was informed of the event ; and he came to the shop, lectured the plundered merchant on his imprudence, and led him before the Caliph ; to whom the merchant gave account of his adventure.

The Caliph and his court were amazed at such audacity ; and he said :

“ In truth I cannot tell what must be done to make end to the cheateries of this outrageous woman ! ”

The Double Theft

ONE day, as Dellé was preparing to go out, her daughters said to her :

“ Do bring us some jewellery ! ”

“ Indeed I will,” she answered ; “ that was exactly my thought.”

And she went away with her two purses, one containing a thousand pieces of Magreb gold, the other a like number of copper coins.

She entered the shop of the leading goldsmith, enwrapped in her old blue mantle ; and she said to him ;

“ I am nurse to one of the Caliph’s daughters. My young mistress has commissioned me to buy her some jewellery, and for this purpose she has given much money to me ; which shall be yours if we can arrange terms.”

Immediately the merchant opened his coffers and showed her girdles and bracelets incrustated with gold and gems ; then anklets, ear-rings and necklaces. She made her choice, and they agreed on the price : precisely one thousand pieces of gold.

The goldsmith made a mental calculation and realised that although he had consented to abate his price by one fourth, his profit would yet be two hundred pieces of gold ; and he chuckled to himself.

THE DOUBLE THEFT

Dellé now gave one of her purses to him. He opened it, shook out the money, and found that it contained a thousand pieces of genuine gold ; so he gave the jewels to his customer.

Now she said to him :

“ We are agreed that, to begin with, I am to show the jewels to my mistress. If she likes them, you will keep the money ; otherwise I am to return the jewels to you and recover my money.”

“ Good ! ” the goldsmith answered. “ The money is a pledge, and becomes mine if you do not return.”

Then she departed with the chosen jewels, went home, and rested in peace.

The hour of afternoon prayer had already passed and the nurse to the princess had not returned. Then the goldsmith said to himself :

“ My goods have found favour, hence a profit of two hundred pieces of gold falls to me.”

As he spoke he took the purse, opened it, and found it stuffed with small change in copper. As may be imagined, Dellé had substituted one purse for the other, deftly.

At this discovery, the goldsmith cried out and gave himself to lamentations. A crowd assembled : and the hadjib, duly informed, hurried thither. The merchant explained what had happened to him. The hadjib led the poor fellow before the Caliph ; to whom he repeated his story. And the Caliph said :

“ Can no one in Bagdad lay hands on this baggage ? ”

The Stolen Gifts

ONE day, as Dellé strolled about the bazaar with her daughters, she saw the poet Abou Doulama riding on a mule, accompanied by a servant carrying a moneybag and fine raiment, gifts from the Caliph. She followed him, watched him arrive at his door, descend from his mule and go into the house. Then the Caliph's servant tethered the mule to a mounting-block near the door, and went off.

Our artful one released the mule and put it in charge of one of her daughters, who led it away. Then Dellé seized the fine raiment and hid it under the cloak of her second daughter ; who withdrew at once. She herself remained at the place where the mule had been tethered.

Abou Doulama, after having passed some time in receiving visitors, and talk, came in quest of the mule, and saw that it had vanished ; whereupon Dellé, to distract his attention from the stolen property, said to him :

“ You have no match in the whole world for depravity. Have you no fear of Heaven ? and is there to be no end to your base conduct to me ? Do you think there is no one to hear my complaints, no one to give justice to me ? ”

THE STOLEN GIFTS

The poet, agitated by this abrupt challenge, let his moneybag fall from his grasp.

"Who are you?" he said to Dellé. "I have never seen you before. What harm have I done to you?"

"Last night," she answered, "having been changed into a mule, I had to carry you on my back; but to-day it has pleased Allah to restore human shape to me. Do you mean so to serve me again?"

"I can make nothing at all of your chatter," he said. "Leave me for a moment, and I will come in search of you presently."

At these words Dellé left him and took up position nearby, after having first seized the moneybag. She watched several visitors come from the house one by one; and finally Abou Doulama joined her, ready in fairness to hear her.

"I was born at Bassora," Dellé said to him. "Now a sorceress lived in that town; and for long she tormented me. Then at last I went to her and we made our peace and she ceased to harass me. But she had a husband, equally learned in sorcery. This man fell hotly in love with me; and I scorned him and refused to yield to him. Then, in his spite, he changed me to a mule. I passed from one master to another, until the hour when I fell into your hands. What suffering I have endured in this fashion! Fortunately the Most High in His mercy heard my ardent prayers and restored human shape to me."

PLEASURE AFTER PAIN

“ I am very glad to hear it,” Abou Doulama answered.

As he left her, he laughed in his beard at the daft tale of this crazy woman.

He returned to his home, met his friends, and offered drink to them in the form of a narcotic mixture ; and soon they began to doze, and fell asleep.

As for Dellé, she too went home, with the purse ; of which she had gained possession so adroitly.

The next day, in the morning, Abou Doulama awakened and, recovering his wits, found that he had been the victim of a triple theft. He hastened to the Caliph and gave an account of the adventure. And the Caliph said :

“ What ! you a poet, and let yourself be cozened by a woman ! ”

He gave orders to his treasurer to make good Abou Doulama’s losses. Then he sent for the hadjib ; and he threatened him, and bade him take all and every means of getting on Dellé’s track and of arresting her.

The hadjib squared to his task, searching diligently here and there ; but always without profit.

The Wedding Gifts

ANOTHER day, Dellé learned that a certain Vizier had given one of his daughters in marriage to the Caliph, and that the wedding had taken place lately.

Our adventuress at once set her wits to work ; and on the morrow she dressed herself in the guise of an honourable lady, and, accompanied by her three daughters, trimmed with jewellery and followed by a like number of young slaves, she went to the Vizier's mansion.

She was admitted to the presence of the mistress of the house, and expressed her good wishes and compliments on the occasion of the recent marriage.

This lady, enchanted by Dellé's flatteries, placed her foremost among the guests, and made enquiry as to her name and position.

Our cunning one, quite composed, invented a huddle of lies ; which were accepted as truth.

Presently Dellé said :

“ I should be most grateful if you would permit me and my daughters and my slaves to glance at the wedding gifts.”

Now the Vizier's wife had arranged the jewels and riches, together with articles lent to her

PLEASURE AFTER PAIN

for display by the most wealthy folk, in the same room ; and in her simplicity she had ordered no one to guard them.

“ Madame,” she said in answer to Dellé, “ I am at your service. Here is the key ; I can entrust all my treasures to you.”

The artful one took the key, saying :

“ Then let us go at once and examine these beautiful things ; for I yearn to feast my eyes on them.”

Then she left the mistress of the house in company with her other guests, went to the room pointed out to her, and began work promptly. She loaded her daughters with jewels, ornaments and costly raiment ; in short, with all she could find. She withdrew, locking the door behind her, and left the house, followed by her companions ; and she went home, rejoicing at her success.

Soon after her departure the Vizier’s servants needed certain things with which to augment the decorations of the wedding-chamber ; and the mistress of the house, in order to supply their wants, went to the rifled room, and found the door locked.

“ Madame,” she said, “ open the door ! ”

No answer.

She knocked many times, in vain. Then the door was forced, the calamity discovered. And the servants said to their mistress :

“ Who was this woman to whom you gave the key ? ”

THE WEDDING GIFTS

"I did not know her," she answered; "but I fancied she must be alike rich and worthy of respect; withal, she was dressed magnificently, and accompanied by three daughters and as many slaves."

And the servants said:

"We shall be extremely astonished if this trick is not the work of Dellé."

"Only Dellé could have done such a thing," the lady answered. "She locked the door, then fled with her companions."

Now the women began to shriek, and the noise soon became a clamour. One might have supposed that here was the Last Judgment.

The Vizier came to make enquiry; then he hurried to the Caliph.

"Prince of the Faithful," he said, "Dellé introduced herself into my house; and she has stolen jewels and trinkets and raiment, in all worth two hundred thousand pieces of gold."

At these words the Caliph put his hands to his head in dismay, reflected awhile, and sent for the hadjib; to whom he said:

"I order that a reward of a thousand pieces of gold be offered publicly to anyone who shall devise a means of laying hands on this accursed woman."

Dellé heard of this proclamation; and shutting herself in her house, she remained there for a time.

The Robbers Robbed

ONE day, when some time had passed, Dellé said to her daughters :

“ Why do we never try anything at night ? ”

And as she spoke she armed herself with a curved dagger, called a *kbandjar*, and with a lasso.

To begin with, she had the house of a certain rich man in view ; and she set herself to examine the approaches. Whilst occupied in this fashion, she was diverted by overhearing a noise of talk among many folk, sounds coming from a building in ruins.

Here were twenty brigands, engaged in dividing their spoil after a robbery.

Dellé returned home without losing a moment ; and her words roused the excitement of her companions.

Her daughters and her slaves smeared their faces with soot and, arming themselves with bare swords, they went with her to the ruined building. They made a great clamour, rushed into the ruins from all sides, fell on the thieves, killed two forthwith, and attacked the rest, flourishing their swords and the *kbandjar*, meanwhile shouting :

THE ROBBERS ROBBED

“Strike at their heads! Spare no one!”

The robbers fled, thoroughly scared, fancying they were attacked by devils; and Dellé found herself in possession of their abandoned plunder.

After her departure, the robbers returned in quest of their dead, and to see if the devils were gone. Dellé, however, divining their intention, and in her cunning, had had the two dead men chopped into little pieces, so that they seemed to have been mangled by some animal.

The robbers, at sight of their bodies, were convinced that they had indeed been attacked by devils, or rather, by the spirits named “dives.” They hastened away to make full report to their leader; and as they were afoot, continuing their retreat, they fell into the hands of the archers of the watch.

Dellé had already reached home, having been some time in shelter with her spoils; meanwhile the watch led their prisoners to the lock-up.

Soon after, the report of this disaster to the robbers reached the Caliph, the spies of the law having heard of it; and he ordered that the robbers should be brought before him, together with whatsoever had been found on them.

Immediately he noticed that there were no swords among the objects taken from them.

“What!” he said, “accustomed as you are to armed robbery, yet you have no weapons!”

And one of the robbers answered:

PLEASURE AFTER PAIN

“ Prince of the Faithful, there were twenty of us ; and we had robbed a caravan, and had withdrawn to a ruin to share our plunder. Suddenly the ghouls¹ attacked us and tore two of our men to shreds. We were horrified at the scene and took flight, abandoning our swords with the rest of the things.”

The hadjib, summoned before the Caliph and informed of this affair, was sent to the ruins in question, and found nothing but the mangled remains of the two bodies.

When the Caliph heard of this he said :

“ Here is yet another of Dellé’s tricks. And as for you,” he added to the robbers, “ you deserve hanging. However, since you have been duped by a woman, you are not greatly to be feared. Perhaps this disaster will lead you to reflection, and you may therefore shun the road to prison.”

They vowed their repentance, were set free, and went their several ways.

¹ “ Dives ” who feed on corpses.

The Midwife's Trick

SOME time passed ; then Dellé dressed herself like an old woman and hobbled painfully through the town, grasping her staff.

She reached a certain street and saw a Jew ; who came from his house. But as he was about to pass on, he stopped and called out :

“Dourdané ! Dourdané ! ”

The servant appeared ; and he said to her :

“ Now I trust to you ! Secure my purse, take the gold that lies on the cash-box and put it inside ; do not leave the house, and do not waste your time. Remember that I, Ishaq the doctor, shall fret myself about my house and possessions, even as you would fret if you found yourself in labour. To be brief with you, look after my place as if you owned it yourself.”

“ Have no fear,” she answered.

At these words Dellé reflected for a while, then went away ; and, from a dealer in drugs, she bought one drachma and a half of cetoun-seed¹ ; in addition she purchased two long, thick cucumbers. Then she went home, dressed herself as a Jewess, returned to the house of Ishaq, and knocked on the door.

¹ A narcotic.

PLEASURE AFTER PAIN

"Dourdané!" she called out, "Dourdané!"

"What do you want?" the servant answered.

"I must speak to the mistress of the house."

At once she was admitted to the Jew's wife; to whom she said:

"Master Ishaq, the doctor, has sent me to you, begging me to bring you this remedy; for it is an aid to conception."

The Jew's wife believed every word.

"Good!" she said, "you are most welcome; indeed, you have foreseen my wants. If your remedy is successful, you may count on a reward."

"Never mind about the reward," Dellé answered. "Now you must do as I tell you."

"At your service," the Jew's wife said.

Then, at Dellé's request, Dourdané brought a drinking-cup.

Our artful one had the lady put to bed, prepared a draught, added a pinch of the narcotic, and gave it to her. And the lady took the cup and drank.

Dellé ordered the servant to cut one of the cucumbers in half, and to apply it to the belly of her mistress.

"'Twill keep her cool," she said.

Now Dourdané thought that she herself might get treatment, and without paying for it.

"I too would dearly like to be a mother," she said; "and my sweetheart and I will be extremely obliged to you and always at your service."

THE MIDWIFE'S TRICK

"If such is your wish," Dellé answered, "I have yet a little of the draught, and it shall be yours. Say no more just now of obligations; I will arrange about such things with you when the affair is ended."

Then she administered the draught, prepared the cucumber; and she put the servant to bed and applied the cucumber.

The servant and the mistress fell asleep promptly; and Dellé at once laid deft hands on gold and costly stuffs, on all things that took her fancy in the house. Then she left the place, shut the door and went home.

As day drew to its close, Master Ishaq returned; and he knocked on the door and called out. No one answered him. The house was low, so he climbed on to the roof; and thus he could see his wife here and Dourdané there, both fast asleep. He made his way into the house, went below, and stood in amazement, seeing that his wife and his servant had each two halves of a cucumber resting on their bellies. He removed the cucumbers; and passed the night in a state of much anxiety, for he was unable to tell what could have happened during his absence from home.

Eventually, at daybreak, the two women awakened; and he questioned his wife.

"But we only followed your instructions," she said.

"What!" he answered, "did I tell you to put a cucumber where I found it?"

PLEASURE AFTER PAIN

She took him by the beard, playfully, saying :
“ Certainly you did ; for that was the instruction given by the woman you sent with the remedies.”

“ What woman and what remedies ? ” he said.
“ I can make nothing of this ! ”

Then they gave him a full account of the adventure, to the moment when they had both fallen asleep.

The Jew, hearing them, now understood everything.

In his distraction he ran to the cash-box, and saw that it was empty, passed through the various rooms, and found that they had been ransacked. He cried out in his rage ; and the women wept and were full of noisy lamentations.

The neighbours who came at the sound of the tumult were visibly astonished and dismayed. The hadjib was informed, reached the house, and took the Jew with him to the Caliph. Ishaq gave a detailed account of his misfortunes.

The Caliph and his Court were dumbfounded at such audacity. And the Caliph said :

“ Shall we never find anyone to deliver us from this infamous woman ! Unless Allah help us, never shall we catch her ! ”

The Bawd Well Paid

ONE day, Dellé went out, dressed like a housewife.

As she trudged along she came to a magnificent house. She noticed a handsome young boy in one of the upper rooms ; and, at the door of the Mosque on the other side of the street, a certain Abou Nouas.

She spoke with the boy ; meanwhile Abou Nouas watched her.

“ I have fine news for you,” she said. “ Come down and I will tell you.”

“ Good ! ” he answered ; and he came down to her.

“ Now go into the house, for your own profit,” she said ; “ and do not come out again until I return.”

This done, she crossed to Abou Nouas ; to whom she said :

“ What are you doing there ? You seem to be waiting for someone.”

“ Who is that fine boy to whom you spoke ? ” he answered.

“ I am his nurse,” she said, “ and he has sent me with a message for you.”

Abou Nouas was exceedingly pleased to hear this.

PLEASURE AFTER PAIN

"He made enquiries about you," Dellé went on, "and wanted to know your age. And he said :

" ' Ask if you may go into his private room ; and here is a note for you, to be transcribed for him. But you must let him have only a copy of it ; otherwise I shall be compromised.' "

" Bravo ! " Abou Nouas answered.

Thereupon he took Dellé into his house ; and she held a paper in her hand, as if it were the original note, from which she transcribed the following words :

" Your Excellency, I must tell you that I, Shariar ben Abdallah, burn at my heart with affection for you, and I am most anxious to meet you ; for I know how generous you are. But I am in love with a beautiful slave-girl, and I must bring her with me so that we may share the pleasure. Now what do you think of this ? When can we meet ? I shall be grateful for any benefits you may deign to bestow on me. "

Abou Nouas, having read these words, and far, far from all suspicion, gave three hundred pieces of gold, together with gems, and stuffs woven in silver and gold, and lengths of silk, thus to the nurse and for the boy.

As he handed these treasures to Dellé, he said :

" Forgive me ; and had I two thousand pieces of gold, they should willingly be yours ; but I do what I can. "

Our fraudulent one went off with her rich plunder and returned to her house.

THE BAWD WELL PAID

Two days, then three passed, and Abou Nouas heard no more either of the nurse or of the boy ; and he was astounded. By and by he accosted the boy and asked him if his nurse had not carried gifts to him from Abou Nouas.

“What do you mean ?” the boy answered. “Who is the nurse, and who is Abou Nouas ? What has all this to do with me ? I know nothing about it.”

At these words our Abou Nouas realised that he had been swindled.

“Alas !” he said, “then I must have seen Dellé.”

He went to the Caliph and told the whole story ; and the Caliph ordered that his losses by Dellé should be made good to him.

The Salved Bucket

ONE day, as Dellé wandered pensively along the road, dressed like a rich lady, she noticed a handsome young man, who sat near to a private house and counted gold from a money-bag placed before him.

At the same time she saw a lady in the distance, coming toward her. And our trickster straightway went to meet her, gave greeting, and entered into conversation with her.

They passed in front of the young money-changer.

He looked intently at Dellé's companion, his scales fell from his hands, and he seemed greatly astonished.

Our cunning one made a stealthy sign to him with her hand, as if she would say: "Have patience; I will return."

In fact, soon after, Dellé, having accompanied the young lady to the end of the road, came back to the money-changer.

He rose to her, bowed politely by way of salutation, and said:

"The lady who has left you even now is in very truth the woman I love."

"And already, for forty days, she has burned in love for you," Dellé answered.

THE SALVED BUCKET

“Good mother,” he said, kissing her hand, “if you succeed with this business, all I have shall be yours.”

“Exercise a little patience,” she answered ; “give me time to fashion my ideas ; and soon you shall have news from me.”

Now she left him ; and she wrote the following letter :

“Light of my eyes, I have heard your prayers. If it please Allah, we shall soon be acquainted ; we will talk together, and become familiar each with the other. But, to this end, you must make enquiry concerning me from my mother. Grant my wishes ; make no delay. Greetings to you !”

Dellé, having written these lines, returned to the young man and gave the letter to him.

When he had read it, he said :

“I understand and will obey.”

Then he called to his slave Khodjesté.

“Help me with this gold-woven robe,” he said, “for I am going to a pleasure party ; and, if I am late in returning, you will say that I shall not be long away. Do not be uneasy on my account. If anyone presents this token, then you must give him whatsoever he demands.”

This said, the moneychanger furnished himself with some pieces of gold ; and Khodjesté went into the house, after having charged himself with the chest in which his master kept his money.

As for Dellé and the young man, they went off

PLEASURE AFTER PAIN

together ; and, after having walked for some time, they reached a house wherein, from the outside, they could see several women. At sight of them, Dellé left her companion and entered the house.

She said to the first woman she met :

“ Would you be good enough to give me a little water so that I can make my ablutions before prayer ? ”

Immediately the one to whom she spoke prepared to go to the well to draw water.

“ Indeed I cannot suffer you to do this for me,” Dellé said. “ You must let me draw the water for myself.”

As she spoke she took the bucket, lowered it down the well, and let it fall into the water ; then, feigning surprise, she cried out aloud.

The woman, aware of the accident, said to Dellé :

“ Do what you can for yourself ; but you must recover our bucket for us.”

“ My servant is outside,” Dellé answered. “ I will fetch him and he can recover the bucket, so do not distress yourself.”

And she went out to find the young man.

“ Your well-beloved has several lady-visitors,” she said to him, “ and before they go they wish to lave their hands and faces. Unfortunately the bucket has fallen into the well ; hasten therefore and pull it out again. So, in a little time, she will be free and can come to find you.”

THE SALVED BUCKET

The moneychanger believed her, undressed ; and by means of a rope he descended into the well.

Dellé forthwith rifled his clothes, seized the already mentioned token, hurried to the young man's house and, presenting this token, demanded his moneybag ; and she went off home with it.

When some time had elapsed, the money-changer, tired of waiting for her, hoisted himself by strength of arm out of the well, dressed again and was much amazed to find no one in sight. He ran home, heard that his gold had been ravished from him, and cried out in his rage.

His neighbours assembled ; and the hadjib, arriving soon after, led the young man before the Caliph, to whom he told his tale.

And the Caliph said :

“ Yet another of Dellé's deceits. Shall we never hear the end of this abominable woman ?

The Too-hasty Payment

SOME time after, as Dellé roamed through the town, she noticed a house laid waste and in ruins. And she said to her daughters :

“ Go, search for the entrance, and see if the place is inhabited.”

Obedient to her commands, they managed to find their way in ; and they returned to Dellé, leading a mule they had discovered as it browsed peacefully in the garden.

She took the mule to the bazaar, and put it in charge of the public auctioneer, saying to him :

“ Sell this animal. I have yet another of the same sort ; and I mean to get rid of that too.”

“ I will give you fifty pieces of gold for this mule,” the auctioneer answered, “ and a similar price for the other.”

The offer was accepted and the auctioneer led the animal to his house. Then he went off with Dellé for the second mule, determined to see to its safe delivery.

When they arrived at the ruined house, she asked him to wait a moment. Then she spoke to a boy already posted by her inside, saying :

“ Is your master there ? ”

“ He went to the Ahmed bazaar,” the boy answered, “ but he came back through the snow, so we were obliged to rub him well,

THE TOO-HASTY PAYMENT

because he had taken cold. I can go and speak to him if you want anything from him."

"Very well," Dellé said. "Now go and fetch the scales so that we can weigh these gold pieces ; for our scales will serve as well as those in the bazaar."

Presently the serving-boy brought the scales, took the money-bag handed to him by the auctioneer, emptied it of coins, weighed them, and replaced them in the bag. Then Dellé said to him :

"Go and carry this bag to your master. These hundred pieces of gold are the price of the two mules. I have handed over the first ; now bring the second to complete the deal."

Then the boy took the bag and passed within, vanishing behind the screen of the entrance.

A little time passed, and Dellé said :

"What is that clown doing ? He wastes his time. I must go and see what he is up to ?"

At these words she went into the house, joined her accomplice ; and together they escaped by a hidden passage.

The auctioneer, after waiting a considerable time and seeing no one return, grew anxious ; and making his way through the entrance, he found himself in a ruin utterly deserted.

He cried out, ran to find the hadjib, and told his tale.

He was taken to the Caliph ; where he gave a full account of the affair. And the Caliph said :

"Yet another of Dellé's wiles !"

The Ill-purchased Slave

ONE day, as Dellé, richly clad, wandered through the town, she saw a white slave and recognised him as a Greek named Yakout belonging to the hadjib ; then she went to meet him, and greeted him, saying :

“ Young man, are you not Yakout ? ”

“ I am,” he said. “ What is it now ? Some woman ? Tell me about it.”

“ I have been sent by a lady of the Caliph’s household,” she answered. “ She said to me :

“ ‘ I have seen this Yakout. He belongs to the hadjib, and I should like to have such a fine young fellow in my own service. Find him, tell him that I have seen him and that we can come to terms if he is willing.’ ”

And the young man answered joyously :

“ It will be enough to tell my master the facts and he will be delighted to offer me as a gift to the lady.”

“ Do not count on that,” Dellé said ; “ for he is notorious as a miser. Has he ever given a present to anyone ? But tell me : what sum did he pay when he bought you ? ”

“ Three hundred pieces of gold.”

“ The Princess is ready to give five hundred pieces of gold. Let us go to the bazaar and speak with the nakhas.¹ You can stay with him

¹ The agent officially appointed for the sale of slaves.

THE ILL-PURCHASED SLAVE

whilst I go in quest of the money, and, when he has received that sum, he will send it to your master ; who, assuredly, will not refuse the chance of gaining two hundred pieces of gold, therefore he will consent to the sale. Then you shall go with me ; I will conduct you to the palace and present you to the lady."

This agreed, they went off together to find the agent.

Dellé left the slave some paces behind her, advanced to the agent, and took him aside.

"Here," she said, "is a boy I wish to sell for three hundred pieces of gold."

"He is well worth that sum," the agent answered.

"He had a dispute with my husband," Dellé said ; "and consequently my husband bade me sell the boy forthwith. I must obey ; you must take the slave immediately ; and so he will not return to our house."

The agent glanced at the slave, and he longed to have charge of him.

"Well, well, my dear," he said, "if you will be content with two hundred pieces of gold, the matter is settled."

Dellé accepted the offer.

Then the agent spoke to the slave, asking if he also consented to the sale.

"Certainly," the slave answered.

The purchaser, overjoyed, ran home, came back with two hundred pieces of gold, and gave

PLEASURE AFTER PAIN

them to Dellé ; and she too went home, now in possession of the money.

Immediately after her departure, the agent called to the slave and offered food to him : roast meats and fruit and honey-cakes. Yakout, however, who expected the arrival of the money from the Princess, had no desire to eat. Therefore he refused the hospitality of the agent ; and he pummelled him, shouting :

“ What is the meaning of this ? What is your game ? Here is a purveyor of human flesh, and he treats me as his equal ! ”

This behaviour staggered the agent for an instant.

“ Idiot ! ” he said when he had recovered. “ Know that I became your master from the moment I paid two hundred pieces of gold for you ! ”

“ Are you mad ? ” the slave answered. “ There is not a man in all Bagdad who does not know to whom I belong ; the first fellow you meet could tell you that ! Now what purchase are you talking about ? ”

“ But you yourself agreed to my buying you ! ”

“ My master is the hadjib of this city. One of the ladies from the palace wants me for herself ; her nurse came to find me, and she wished to buy me from the hadjib for five hundred pieces of gold. We came to you to arrange the affair. That was the sale I consented to.”

“ I never heard a word of all this until now,” the agent answered. “ A woman came to me ;

THE ILL-PURCHASED SLAVE

and she said she had a slave to sell. I offered two hundred pieces of gold to her ; she agreed and took the money. That is how I got possession of you."

And Yakout said :

" I am very much afraid you have lost your money."

Meanwhile the hadjib had returned to his house ; and, being unable to find his slave, he assumed the fellow had wandered off.

Soon after, a police-officer came to tell him he had seen Yakout with the dealer in slaves. And the hadjib said :

" No doubt the agent is engaged in chiding him."

The hadjib, however, went to the agent ; and here he saw his slave resting at ease.

" What has happened and why are you here ?" the hadjib said.

" Alas, your Excellency," the agent answered, " you shall know what has happened."

And he told the whole story.

Now the hadjib began to laugh ; and he said :

" Dellé, as a diversion, has amused herself by duping you ; and surely she did not make you pay excessively. Did she chance to name the many qualities of my slave to you ? For otherwise you cannot accuse her of exaggerating his merits."

Thereupon he led the poor dupe before the Caliph ; and as a sole consolation he had the honour of telling his adventures to that Prince.

The Charitable Vizier

ONE day Dellé left her house ; and as she went toward the Caliph's palace, she saw Yahia the Barmecide engaged in administering justice on the vizierial bench. By and by he made end to the sitting and returned to his home ; and Dellé stole a place among his followers.

As he was passing near to a ruined building, one of his companions warned him of danger from falling stones.

At once Dellé learned that the man who thus preceded Yahia was named Abdallah Hashemi ; and without delay she went home and wrote a letter, saying :

“I am the mother of three daughters by Abdallah Hashemi. Of all the possessions I had, nothing remains to me but a house ; and we sleep on straw. I am deserted, living alone with my three daughters, abandoned of all men.”

This done, she went to give her hurried plaint to Yahia, the Barmecide, having dressed for her part ; and he in answer said to her briefly :

“I see.”

At his command, one of the attendants went with Dellé to enquire into her situation. He entered her dwelling-place ; and, since she

THE CHARITABLE VIZIER

had taken precautions beforehand, he saw a hovel bare of all necessities. He returned to his master after visiting her thus, and made his report.

"Then I am to understand that she lacks all things," the Vizier said, "even to blankets and a mattress."

He sent one hundred pieces of Magrebin gold, together with one thousand smaller pieces to her; also he informed the petitioner that each day she might come to his house for all things needful.

Soon after, Dellé presented herself before Yahia as he was in session. She praised him and thanked him publicly.

Hitherto no one had expressed gratitude to him in this fashion, so that he was alike astonished and moved at her behaviour.

She spoke eloquently to him, calling him Father, saying that he, the Vizier, acted like the Head of a family.

So he ordered the treasurer to give one thousand pieces of gold to Dellé, portion by portion.

Some time elapsed; and the treasurer appeared before Yahia, telling him that the woman had used the whole sum.

"The first time she comes in search of you," the Vizier answered, "bring her to me and I will enquire into her position."

Eventually she came to the treasurer; and he said to her :

PLEASURE AFTER PAIN

"Have a little patience; for the Vizier, before granting new favours to you, is anxious to question you on the state of your affairs."

"It is impossible for me to present myself before anyone, dressed as I am," Dellé answered. "I will hasten home, change my raiment, and will return straightway. I have a magnificent Koran and I mean to bring it as a gift to the Vizier. Now let me take this small praying-mat, with which I can enwrap my gift suitably."

The treasurer gave the mat to her and she went off with it.

Two days later, the treasurer, rather disquieted, spoke to his master, saying :

"The woman known to you came to me the day before yesterday. I told her of your desire to see her; and she said: 'I must go and dress myself decently.' Then she left me, and I even allowed her to take my praying-mat; nor have I heard anything whatsoever of her since."

This time, the Vizier commanded the treasurer to go to the woman's house, saying to himself :

"Perhaps she may have an excuse to offer."

The treasurer, well attended, went to the place mentioned; and immediately they entered they saw that the hovel was utterly deserted. They questioned the neighbours, saying :

"What sort of folk lived here?"

"The place has been empty for many years," the neighbours answered. "But recently some

THE CHARITABLE VIZIER

poor women took shelter in it. Now they are gone away, and we know not what has become of them.”

The treasurer returned to his master and told him the result of his enquiries.

Yahia, hearing this story, realised that these events were the work of Dellé.

The Caliph, informed of the facts, could do no more than express his vexation anew.

A Perilous Trap

ONE day, Dellé discovered a well among the ruins she haunted. She gave orders, and her daughters and servants covered the opening with small branches, straw and the like rubbish ; then they disguised their work with a thin layer of earth. This done, Dellé betook herself to a rich moneychanger, and said to him :

“ We are celebrating a wedding. Bring silver plate worth a thousand pieces of gold and come along with me, and no doubt we can do business together ; withal, bring anything precious you may have and suitable for wedding-gifts. If you do not sell the whole lot, at least one half will find a purchaser.”

The merchant was overjoyed at the prospect ; and he said to himself :

“ My fortune is made.”

He loaded a large crate with all his silver, and followed Dellé.

Presently he was fatigued ; and Dellé, having a servant with her, said to him :

“ How tired you are ! Why not give the crate to my boy and he can carry it.”

The moneychanger agreed ; and the boy followed them with the crate on his back.

Dellé had allowed the moneychanger to

A PERILOUS TRAP

precede her ; and he reached the disguised well, stepped on to it, and fell in.

At this sight, Dellé's accomplice made off with the crate and went home.

And the artful one cried out :

"What a disaster ! How could he fall into a well ?"

She seized a rope and lowered it to the money-changer, saying :

"Strip yourself to begin with, and I will fish up your clothes so that they shall not be spoiled by the water, nor damaged as you climb out."

The unfortunate man did as she bade him, undressed himself and attached his clothes to the rope. Dellé raised them, made them into a bundle ; and went off with them, leaving her dupe at the bottom of the well.

Soon after, and by chance, someone passed nearby ; and, hearing cries, he came to the edge of the well and saw a man at the bottom of it. He went in quest of help, and so by strength of arm the moneychanger was hauled out. And his rescuers said to him :

"What has to happened to you ?"

Then he told his tale. The hadjib was informed, and carried the news to the Caliph ; who could not prevent himself from laughing when he heard the moneychanger's account. And the Caliph said :

"Here I have a crowd of guards ; in addition I have a clever hadjib ! Now what more can I need to get the better of this female rascal !"

The False Judge

DELLÉ, on occasion, chanced to be wearied at home ; so she thought she would play a trick on a very miserly rich man named Ali Qouthni.

She dressed herself like a Cadi, wore a false beard and allowed the stuff of her turban to hang down the middle of her back, a fashion adopted by learned men who pride themselves on their correct manners.

At the moment when Dellé, thus disguised, drew near to the house of Ali Qouthni, he was disputing with his wife ; and he opened the door, meaning to call his steward. He saw Dellé, assumed she must be a Cadi of the town, came to meet her and saluted her.

“ My Lord Judge,” he said, “ I am your servant ! Be pleased to come in.”

The false judge entered the house, and took position in a room encumbered with furniture to the pitch of obstruction.

“ Now you are here,” Ali Qouthni said to her, “ I wish you to give judgment between me and my wife ; and whether you find me in the right or the wrong, your visit will nevertheless do honour to my house.”

THE FALSE JUDGE

Dellé said to him :

“Tell me the facts from the beginning to the end ; then I shall be able to give a right judgment.”

“Recently,” he answered, “when I was in the country, I bought a fat lamb. I gave it to a herdsman so that he might cook it, and then bring it for us to eat. My wife declares that, since he has failed to appear, Dellé must have stolen the lamb from him.”

“Your wife cannot be blamed for such a suggestion,” the false judge said ; “for Dellé is perpetually defrauding all who chance to come her way in Bagdad. Now are you not aware that there is no place hereabout secure against her cheateries ? You ought to give thanks to Allah if this sly creature, knowing your wealth and position, has stolen only a lamb from you. I see through her stratagem : she intended to come with the lamb, so to thrust herself in as your guest, by this means lulling your suspicion of any further wile or caper on her part.”

Ali, having reflected, approved of this explanation.

At this moment, Dellé noticed that there was a vault under the sofa, and she said :

“Now descend into the vault and be quiet ; for I am about to utter a magic incantation ; to which, when I have finished, you must say Amen, so that it may bring profit to you.”

PLEASURE AFTER PAIN

As soon as Ali had descended into the vault, she shut the trap-door on him and shot the bolt. Her daughters were in the street, awaiting a signal from her. She went to them, told them what had happened ; and they entered the house, ransacked it, and left with Dellé.

Ali Qouthni, after a considerable time, astonished because the supposed judge gave no sign of life, called to him, saying :

“ My Lord Judge, why have you shut the trap-door ? Open it so that I may come out and see what you are doing ! ”

There was no answer, in spite of his repeated cries.

Day passed, likewise the night, and he yet remained a prisoner. In the morning one of his neighbours came to make demand on him ; and, entering the house, this neighbour saw all things in disarray and heard lamentable cries from the vault under the closed trap-doors. He was amazed, raised the traps, and set the prisoner free ; and Ali Qouthni, having had neither food nor drink since the day before, looked like a dying man.

Though he was so much exhausted, he did not fail to see that the house had been pillaged, and that all things portable had been taken away.

The unfortunate fellow wept and sorrowed greatly, then went to the Caliph and told him of his adventure.

The Caliph, although inwardly disgusted at

THE FALSE JUDGE

this knavery, could not help laughing in face of the facts.

At length he said :

“ This, unquestionably, is the work of Dellé.”

And when he had consoled Ali Qouthni with kind words, he sent him away.

Dellé Caught

ONE day, Dellé went through the town reciting the Koran, disguised as a pious woman, and with her chapelet hung around her neck. In this fashion she attracted the attention of the hadjib's men ; and they said :

“ Here is that baggage of a Dellé at last ! ”

They arrested her.

She made protest, and declared she was only an old woman retired from the world and devoted solely to religious practices ; but they led her to the Caliph.

She began by pouring out words in praise of him ; the Caliph, however, interrupted her, saying :

“ In spite of your big talk you do nothing but cheat the people. Have you no fear of Allah ? Now what can you say for yourself ? ”

“ O Prince of the Faithful ! ” she answered, “ descendant of Abbas, the son of Abel Moutaleb ! do not in your might overpower a poor old woman past fifty. Though many sins can be charged to me, and though till this day I have shown neither sorrow nor repentance, yet I am firmly resolved to behave differently in the future.”

The Caliph was impressed, saying to himself :

DELLÉ CAUGHT

“ Perhaps she speaks truth. If she is sinful, am I not myself a sinner ! ”

As he reflected, Fazil and Yahia, the Barmecides, came on him unexpectedly ; and at sight of Dellé they cried out :

“ Thanks be to Allah ! You are caught at last, infamous woman ! ”

They continued, addressing the Caliph :

“ No doubt whatsoever, this is indeed Dellé. My Lord ! guard yourself against the artfulness of her tongue ; for even now she almost beguiled you with her cunning.”

By order of the Caliph she was bound, and they started to beat her. Then she fell prostrate, her face to the earth, saying in a loud voice :

“ May the Most High forgive the doers of this outrage, for all madness is excusable.”

They could extract no confession from her by beating her, yet they gave her the prescribed eighty strokes. Then, at the word of the Caliph, she was raised and taken to the foot of the gallows. And the Caliph said to her :

“ Restore the stolen property to the people ; otherwise you shall be hanged.”

Even this threat failed to persuade her to a true repentance ; hence, by formal order of the Caliph, she was tied to the gallows.

At this moment, Ali Qouthni came on the scene ; and he shouted at her :

“ There you are, accursed one, in the hands of justice ! I give thanks to Allah because I have seen you in this plight.”

PLEASURE AFTER PAIN

“ Ah ! you, is it ? ” she said. “ Know then, as to that fat lamb, you have cause to divorce your wife ! ”

At these words he fled, covered with shame and pursued by the jeers of the crowd.

Soon after, night fell, and the guards composed themselves to sleep.

Presently Dellé saw a man pass by, mounted on a camel ; and she said to him :

“ My friend, the Caliph has condemned me to death. I have nothing to give you ; but if you will make oath to me, one in which I can trust, I will tell you of treasure to satisfy you, on condition that you give half of it to my daughters.”

“ At your service,” the camel-driver answered. “ I swear by the hair of my head.”

“ There is a Mosque in face of the house you can see from here,” she said ; “ and there lies the treasure I speak of : not under the *mihrab*¹ but at the side. Now go and find it.”

“ What shall I do with my camel whilst I am searching ? ”

“ Make the camel kneel here.”

At these words the fellow descended from his camel, left it on its knees, and went in quest of the treasure.

Now one of Dellé's daughters had hidden herself nearby ; and she came into the open, took possession of the camel, and led it to her mother's house.

¹ Part of the pulpit,

DELLÉ CAUGHT

By and by the owner of the camel returned from the Mosque, without having found any treasure.

"Where is my camel?" he said.

Dellé, however, did not answer; so he began to complain, reproaching her.

The guards, hearing him, awakened; and the camel-driver told his tale.

The guards took him to the Caliph; who could not help laughing when he heard of the adventure. And the Caliph said:

"Your lust for gain has cost you your camel!"

Then he summoned the hadjib.

"This abominable woman," he said to him, "continues her games though tied to the gallows. She must be shut in a chest; which you shall confide to the care of a ship's captain."

The hadjib, obedient to this command, busied himself in freeing Dellé from the gallows. Then he enclosed her in a chest, and put it in charge of a ship's captain; who transferred it to his vessel.

By and by, Dellé began to talk in the chest, saying:

"Would that the Spring were here, that it might adorn the landscape! When wilt thou come that I may behold thee!"

The sailors, hearing her voice, were afraid; for they imagined they were in the presence of a saint, one blessed with heavenly visions.

"Here is a Holy One," they said among themselves; "and we ought not to drown her."

PLEASURE AFTER PAIN

Then they took Dellé from the chest.

"Sailors," she said to them, "why am I here with you?"

"We are under the orders of the hadjib," one of them answered. "We know nothing of the faults committed by you; but the hadjib commanded us to fling you into the sea."

Forthwith Dellé prostrated herself before them, crying out:

"Merciful Allah! judge between me and my son. He stole my senses by drugs and gave me into the power of these men, to be drowned by them. May he repent! and indeed I cannot call on You to bless this cruel man!"

Now the captain, hearing her prayers, was moved deeply; and he said to himself:

"'Tis a serious business, drowning the mother of the hadjib."

Without delay, he took Dellé to his own house, and told his folk that she was the mother of the hadjib. Then he said to himself:

"I am well out of a wicked hole; for, though the hadjib will be angry, since he commanded me to drown her, yet, when he is repentant, having given such an order, he will present me with a robe of honour."

On the morrow he went off in search of the hadjib. And the hadjib questioned him, and received an account, in part, of the recent events. Then the hadjib said in a loud voice:

"Alas! what have you done? Can the orders of the Caliph ever be violated? In this affair

DELLÉ CAUGHT

we are concerned with property lost by many people ! ”

When the hadjib had spoken thus, he went to present himself to the Caliph, in company with the sailors.

Meanwhile, Dellé, alone with the Captain's wife, asked for a scrap of paper and a reed-pen. Then she wrote the following lines :

“ To the chief moneychanger. Give the sum of one thousand pieces of gold to the bearer on my account. This note will serve as a receipt. Greetings ! ”

She handed the writing to the Captain's wife, saying :

“ Here is a message for the chief moneychanger. Give it to him, and he will hand you one thousand pieces of gold. Do as I bid you, return to me ; and the money shall be yours.”

The captain's wife, overjoyed, went to the quarters of the chief moneychanger, leaving her house in the sole charge of Dellé ; who promptly ransacked the whole place, and fled.

During this time, the hadjib and the sailors were awaiting the moment when they might go before the Caliph. And the Captain said to the hadjib :

“ Now I will relieve your mind of a great weight. I have not drowned your mother ; for she is at my house. You ought at least to give me a robe of honour for this service.”

“ But my mother died long ago ! ” the hadjib answered. “ What do you mean ? ”

PLEASURE AFTER PAIN

They had reached this stage in their talk when news came from the captain's wife, instructing them that the woman in question had pillaged the whole house, and had escaped.

The Caliph was exceedingly vexed with his hadjib when he heard the facts ; and he said to him :

“ Find that woman within three days or you shall take her place on the gallows.”

Thenceforth the hadjib began to search feverishly ; but he could not find Dellé.

She was disquieted, assuring herself that she would be imperilled if she remained in Bagdad. And she said to her daughters :

“ We must away with our spoils.”

Accordingly she left for Cairo with her husband, her daughters and sons-in-law, and her servants ; and housed herself in that city.

The End of Dellé

ONE day, as she was going through the streets of Cairo, intent to play some trick in her customary manner, she noticed a splendid house. In she went, and begged water for her ablutions.

Now the master of the house was a Bagdad man ; and he recognised Dellé.

He said to his wife :

“ Make your prayers with this woman.”

Then he left home, quickly gathered a half-score of lusty fellows, armed them, and led them to his house by a secret door.

When half the night had gone by, the Master noticed the approach of seven persons ; and Dellé, who had remained in the house, went to open the door for them. They entered without sound, laid hands on everything they could seize, fastened their bundles and departed.

Our man, uttering no word, followed them, made sure of their quarters, and hid himself. And, at the moment when the seven robbers came into sight again, meaning to return to the house and to finish their work, the Master left his place of concealment. And with the aid of his ten lusty fellows he seized the robbers ; then, so disposed, they waited for daybreak.

PLEASURE AFTER PAIN

Now he went to the lieutenant-vizier of Egypt; to whom he told the facts.

They took possession of Dellé's house, discovering the enormous booty from her thefts ; and a message demanding instructions was sent to Bagdad.

Eventually Dellé's victims arrived ; and, after they had recovered their goods, they burned the house, together with the accursed woman and her gang.

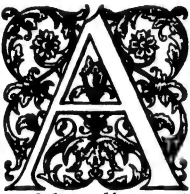
And so evil was suppressed at the roots ; for not one of her family escaped, and men were delivered and insured of safety.

May the Most High preserve you, good people my brothers, from robbers and cheats and the ways of all such.

The mercy of Heaven rest on the author, the copyist, the reader, and on all who listen.

Chapter Two

The Architect, his Wife, and the Three Viziers of the Sultan of Guvashir

 AN ARCHITECT of the old town Bim, in Kerman, was so clever at his work that his fame spread in all directions; but he was so lazy, so much the friend of idleness, that rarely did he work; and he allowed his fellows to overreach him on all likely occasions.

However, he had a wife, a virtuous woman endowed with wit and charm, and without match in the ordering and the love of her household.

One day, as they were talking familiarly together, the conversation chanced to light on wealth and poverty.

“Alas !” the lady said, “you will never be rich if you never make end to anything you undertake; for, in truth, Allah gives daily bread only to those who apply themselves to work and who use all their gifts.”

“In this town my reputation for idleness is

PLEASURE AFTER PAIN

firm-set," the husband answered, "nor shall I ever be able to make headway against it. Let us go to some other town. We must make up our minds to this change; for here my affairs slide from bad to worse and, all things considered, we shall soon be utterly ruined."

"In my opinion," she said, "success comes to those who deserve it; therefore your plan fills me with hope. If it shall please Allah, we may escape from our trouble, and I shall no longer have to endure shame in this town."

At these words the husband rejoiced exceedingly; and he thanked her.

Soon after, he decided to take to the road, and began to make preparation. And when he was about to leave his wife, she gave a slim young sprig of cypress to him, saying:

"Take this with you for remembrance; may you continue to be likewise young, and may it remind you that I wait for you. If ever you should see it fade, know that my proven fidelity to you begins to wane."

Thereupon he bade farewell to his wife, went from her; and, after journeying stage by stage, at length he reached the town of Guvashir.

Here he wished to make use of his art; but he was unknown.

One day he ventured publicly to ask if there were any architects in the place; and the folk said to him:

"Certainly; but our Sultan has imprisoned the whole lot."

THE ARCHITECT AND HIS WIFE

He was amazed.

"But why?" he said.

"Our Prince ordered that a splendid *imaret*¹ should be built," they answered, "yet none of the architects dare undertake the work; so the Sultan, infuriated, had them all imprisoned."

The architect asked where the prison stood; and when the folk saw him hasten thither, they thought he was mad.

Immediately on his arrival he obtained the necessary permission from the head-gaoler and sought the prisoners; to whom he gave greeting, telling them who he was and explaining the wherefore of his visit.

One of the prisoners said to him:

"Dear Master, Allah Himself in His mercy has brought you to this country, so to set us free Welcome to you!" the others added in their joy, continuing: "Know that our Prince sent for us, since he wished to have a pavilion and a palace built; and he said to us:

"By such a monument we mean to leave a symbol of our might to futurity; and you must achieve this work, otherwise each and all of you shall be sentenced to a fine of a thousand pieces of gold.'"

"Now none of us offered to undertake the task. And the Sultan was angry, and he condemned us to prison. And who can tell when we should have been set free, had not Allah sent you to the town to succour us!"

¹ A refectory for students and poor folk.

PLEASURE AFTER PAIN

“Your trust in me is well-founded,” the architect answered. “If it shall please Allah, I will accomplish this task to the satisfaction of your sovereign.”

The prisoners were delighted. They told their news to the Sultan and besought him to grant an audience to their friend. The Sultan gave gracious heed to their request; and he said, when the architect was brought before him:

“Master, do you feel competent to build the intended palace to my satisfaction, after submitting your designs?”

“Sire,” the architect answered, “I am ready to build whatsoever you may wish, and in such fashion that not only the Sultan, but also his entire people will be content with my work.”

Soon after, by order of the Sultan, the necessary materials were collected on the site of the building, and an auspicious hour was chosen for the laying of the first stone; our architect, meanwhile, received a robe of honour, and the other architects were placed under his direction. Day and night the work progressed; and, in a little time, a magnificent palace and a graceful pavilion were raised. Never before had Sovereign possessed so noble a dwelling.

The Sultan, his Lords and his people were ravished at the sight; and the Sultan in his gratitude presented the architect with ten thousand pieces of stamped gold, an imperial robe of honour, and a thorough-bred mule with splendid gold-embroidered trappings.

THE ARCHITECT AND HIS WIFE

In addition, he gave a pension, and supplies each day ; withal, an apartment in the palace. In short, he overwhelmed the architect with favours, benefits, honours, and to such an extent that the architect ranked at court equally with Viziers and Lords.

He won distinction by his honest good sense, penetration, sagacity and shrewdness. He was worthy the rank of Vizier in his prudence and knowledge ; consequently the Sultan determined so to honour him, attaching him to his house by family-ties ; resolved, in fact, to load this great man with all things at his own royal disposal.

Now the Sultan had three Viziers ; who, on learning the design of their Prince, vowed eternal hatred against the architect, and could think of nothing save the contriving some reliable plot with which to confound him. Each morning they met at the palace and, as they walked together, sought vainly to devise a malicious intrigue, so to divert the humour of the Sultan ; and they were much troubled at their failures.

As we have said, our architect had built an enchanting pavilion, at once graceful and original, and adjoining the palace ; and by order of the Sultan this pavilion had been adorned with hangings of brocade.

One day, the Sultan proposed to visit the pavilion, intending there to rest agreeably for a little time.

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Some hours ere the arrival of the Sultan, our architect had entered this pavilion, where often he betook himself. The memory of his wife had revived in him, and he sat deep in reflection, emotionally regarding the sprig of cypress given to him by his wife; and he wept.

Presently he was drowsy, and fell asleep.

At this moment, by the will of Allah, one of the Viziers came to the pavilion; and, seeing the architect asleep, he rejoiced, saying to himself:

“Here is a fine opportunity to disgrace this intruder in view of our Sultan.”

Without losing a moment he sent for three great flagons of wine, dishes of roast meats, and a platter of sweetmeats. Then he splashed wine and scattered various foods on the throne, on the carpet, the matting and the table.

This done, he shut and bolted the door, and, in his eagerness to disgrace his enemy and to shower disparagement and slanders on him, he ran to meet the Sultan, having spied his approach.

“Sire,” he said to him, “though you are the most beneficent of Sovereigns, yet there must be a limit to your indulgence; for if the people come to imagine there is no end to your patience, they will give themselves to all kinds of excess.”

“What do you mean?” the Sultan answered.

“Alas, Sire! your architect has betaken himself to the pavilion of your new palace

THE ARCHITECT AND HIS WIFE

in order to give himself to debauch. He has not only defiled the throne of our Sultan : he has soiled even the imperial carpet and matting. There he lies, full length, overpowered by drunkenness, with no sense of his surroundings, and in the midst of a sacrilege committed by him ; for his wine and his sweet-stuffs are spread abroad everywhere. I was revolted at sight of such crimes, and hastened to tell our Master ; for such doings cannot remain unpunished. ‘Despite the benevolence and tolerance of our Sultan, he will not suffer this’ : so I said to myself in my disgust.”

At these words the Sultan felt considerably annoyed.

“ If you speak truly,” he said, “ the culprit shall suffer the weight of our displeasure.”

“ If you would assure yourself of the facts,” the Vizier answered, “ you need only send some trusty servants to the pavilion.”

The Sultan accordingly gave orders ; and soon the accusation against the architect was confirmed in all respects by the emissaries. Then the Sultan commanded that the architect should be brought to him ; and by and by the culprit was haled to the foot of the throne.

“ How dare you give yourself openly and without shame to such insolence ! ” the Sultan said to him. “ Is it to such an end that we have allowed you to live in our palace, and have given a pension of a thousand pieces of gold to you, so that you might defile the place with

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impunity and at your pleasure? What can I do save act in such fashion that by your punishment you shall stand as an example to others?"

The unhappy architect, bewildered and terrified, flung himself prone to the ground, crying:

"Benevolent Sultan! Heaven indeed sees that I am innocent of all this! Know that Allah in his favour has united me to a chaste and virtuous woman, for whom I have a profound love. At the moment when I was about to leave her, she gave a young sprig of cypress to me, saying: 'Keep this for remembrance, and if you should see it fade, you will know that my fidelity to you begins to wane.' Now this morning I went into the pavilion of the palace, and I was admiring the beauty and elegance of the place; and, in my meditation, thinking simultaneously of the brilliant position I owe to you and of the woman from whom I am separated, I grasped the sprig of cypress, beset as I was with sad reflections; but soon I fell asleep. So I remained, awakening only when your servants came, seized me roughly, and led me to your presence. I swear by the Most High that I know no more than I have spoken."

He began to weep, continuing:

"If accusations have been brought to you against me, then they are lies and cheateries; and though they crush me with sorrow, the truth will come to light and the real culprit must be discovered."

THE ARCHITECT AND HIS WIFE

The Sultan saw from the attitude of the unfortunate fellow that he spoke frankly and without guile ; and the Sultan said :

“ Did you not take even a little of the wine ? ”

“ Not a drop,” the architect answered.

The Sultan ordered that someone should smell the architect’s breath ; and this test was conclusive.

Now the Sultan realised that the Vizier had lied. He dismissed his court, the folk went their several ways ; and the architect, deep in his musings, returned to his apartment.

When the Viziers saw how the matter had developed, they set their wits to work in quest of means to promote a new intrigue.

“ We must take him apart and make him eat and drink,” they said among themselves ; “ and when he is fuddled, and thanks to the friendship we must profess to him, he will tell us all we wish to know about himself and his wife. Once we are soundly instructed by this means, we will write to him, as from some neighbour, concerning the behaviour of his chaste spouse. We will say that she begins to allow someone to pay court to her ; we will urge him to hasten home so that he may take account of things, for otherwise calamity may befall either the mistress or the lover.”

Without further delay they launched their scheme, arranging a pleasure-party and inviting their enemy. And they persuaded him to excess in food and drink, then took advantage of his

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intoxication, so to extract from him all sorts of details. They used their discoveries in the writing of a crafty letter, sealed it under his very nose ; and, when some days had passed, they had it conveyed to him by a traveller from abroad, a stranger to him.

When the architect, reading the letter, found not only an accurate account of the position of his house, but also the name of his wife and that of several neighbours, he had no doubts whatsoever. Immediately he went to the Sultan, kissed the ground at his feet, and begged permission to return to his home.

At this sight, the Viziers, happy because of the success of their plot, assumed the duty of adding their persuasion so that the Sultan might grant the architect's request. The Sultan, astonished at their insistence, suspected some knavery. He addressed the architect, saying :

“ What is the motive that prompts you to demand leave of absence ? ”

Forthwith the architect handed the ominous letter to the Sultan ; who, after having read, added :

“ If your wife misbehaves herself, you ought to pronounce the words of malediction against her, since that will divorce you from her ; then we will give you another wife, and load you with titles and honours and goods.”

The poor man answered without pause :

“ That is impossible for me.”

THE ARCHITECT AND HIS WIFE

At these words the Viziers drew near to him, and spoke to him, upholding their Prince, saying :

“Why should you go from us, Master? We ourselves have made enquiry about your wife’s conduct; and there is no sufficient reason for your leaving this court. You are impelled by mistaken thoughts.”

“What know you about my wife and her movements?” he said hotly. “What proof can you give? As for me, indeed I have proof! The sprig of young cypress always remains green, therefore I do not doubt the fidelity of my wife, and your words serve to strengthen my confidence in her. That is why I beg leave of absence from the Sultan.”

“But,” one of the Viziers answered, aware that the scene amused the Sultan, “know then that we ourselves have been in communication with her. Do you want proofs? I have as many as you can ask.”

Then he described to the architect the district where he lived and the road in which his house stood; also the name of his wife, and those of his neighbours; and he went on:

“If our Sultan grants permission, one of us will go to your town, and return, bringing a double token, straight from your chaste spouse.”

Now the unfortunate fellow lost heart.

“So let it be,” he said, “and if one of you goes, and brings clear proof direct from my wife, I will believe all that you say, and I will

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disown her and spend the rest of my days near to the Sultan."

"We agree," the Viziers answered, "but only on condition that the architect shall be confined for ten days, the time needful to reach the town where he lived and to return with the required proofs."

The Sultan agreed to confine the architect during the period named.

Then, without more delay, one of the Viziers set out directly for Bim, well-provisioned with gold, jewels and costly stuffs. Eventually he reached the town, and found the specified district without difficulty, thanks to the instructions with which he was furnished.

An old, intriguing woman lived in the town, one worthy to rank with Dellé, and of whom he had heard from the architect. The Vizier sought for her, and addressed himself to her with all sorts of amenities and compliments.

"You are welcome," she said to him, "and I am at your service. Through me you will be able to command any of the inhabitants of this quarter. If you have business here, as I gather from your visit, I will conduct it most admirably for you. What do you want of me? I have lived here for a long time; and since you honour my house with your presence, my wishes shall be your wishes; for in me you have a helpmate always at your service. Now tell me what it is you want."

"I am a stranger in this town," the Vizier

THE ARCHITECT AND HIS WIFE

answered, "and I am here only for a few days. If there should be a woman in the place unrivalled for her beauty, I trust myself to you and and I will give anything you may ask to you and to her."

The old, intriguing woman reflected for a moment, then she said :

"The wife of an architect lives nearby ; and certainly she would suit you perfectly. She is alike very pretty and most amiable ; and her husband is away from home. I cannot tell whether I shall be able to succeed with her actually to-day ; but I can go to her, speak with her, and bring an answer to you."

"Good !" the Vizier said ; "and if she is as you describe her, she will content me. Now I must wait here so that I may know her answer to you."

"At your service, my Lord," the old woman answered.

She left him forthwith and went off to find the wife of the architect ; to whom she said :

"My dear lady, an illustrious person, a Vizier, has arrived in the town. He is most anxious to meet you. If you will entertain him for a night or two he will shower gifts on you. One word from you and I will send valuable tokens of his gratitude in advance to you."

The honest wife of the architect, hearing this, was filled with indignation ; but a thought came to her, and she said to herself :

"This is perhaps an effect having cause in

PLEASURE AFTER PAIN

some hidden design of Providence ; and I must search into the matter. I can only depend on myself, yet must I seek to fathom the truth."

And she said to the old woman :

" Madam, do as you will."

The intriguing creature was delighted, and left her at once.

Now the faithful wife had a man-servant, and a female slave, at command, alike devoted to their mistress ; who explained matters to them.

" As for you," she said to the girl, " you are loyal to me and I have confidence in you. I must know why this Vizier has come to this town. Go and make enquiries about him and his intentions, use all your wit to this end, and return to me with trusty news."

Then the slave-girl went off and sought the people attending on the Vizier ; and she mingled with them and talked with them subtly. She learned that their master was one of the Viziers of the Sultan of Guvashir ; also that though the reason of his visit to Bim was certainly important, they knew it not.

Now the artful spy returned to her mistress and made her report ; and she added a fact learned indirectly concerning her master the architect, to the effect that he lived at the court of the Guvashir Sultan, enjoying great favour under this Prince, having built a palace and a pavilion, much to the satisfaction of the said Sultan.

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The lady, hearing this report, and not devoid of sagacity, drew her own conclusions, divining the purpose of the Vizier, seeing need for much prudence in her conduct ; and she explained these notions to her two servants.

“ Take heed, act cautiously,” she added ; “ for our safety depends on our wariness. And may Heaven save us from this dangerous pass and keep us whole and safe.”

Hardly had she finished speaking when the old woman came to her, burdened with a parcel of stuffs.

“ The Vizier sends his compliments,” she said.

The mistress of the house, at sight of the beautiful raiment spread out on the carpet, rose and, by courtesy, returned the compliments, saying :

“ Dear Madam, give my thanks to the man who sends you, and tell him I am entirely at his service. I think of him without ceasing ; but how can we arrange matters ? I never leave my house, for I have enemies. Now impose two conditions on him : he must come to this house and he must come alone ; for I am determined that there shall be no witness to our gay meeting.”

Then the intriguing old woman returned to the Vizier and told him the commands of the lady ; and he agreed readily. He sent the old busybody to the lady’s house with candles and wine, together with numerous other things.

PLEASURE AFTER PAIN

And the wife of the architect, on her part, prepared divers foods and many kinds of refreshment.

About nightfall she fulfilled her duties in prayer ; and while she was yet on the praying mat, holding her book, the old intriguer arrived.

" May I come in ? " she said ; " may I bring him to you ? "

" In a moment. I am finishing my prayers, since night is only now approaching."

Accordingly, soon after, the old woman went to fetch the Vizier ; and she led him into the lady's house, then withdrew.

He was welcomed by the lady, and she smiled on him, inclined herself before him, kissing his hands ; and she installed him on the sofa, ceremoniously, then stepped a few paces from him and stood upright, respectful in her attitude.

" I cannot suffer you to treat me as if I were superior to you," he said. " Do me the honour of seating yourself also."

She sat down beside him, and he began to caress her gently.

The night was warm, and the servants brought sherbert ; and the lady served as cupbearer to the Vizier. Then came food, and later, wines ; and the Vizier challenged the lady to drink with him, cup in hand.

" I am ready to be agreeable to you in most things," she said ; " but not in this matter of

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wine ; indeed, should you insist, I would much rather drink poison, above all to-day when I ought to abstain from every foolishness ; for I expect my brothers and kinsmen at any moment. Therefore my chamber is not free to-night."

The Vizier, instructed in this way, decided to make the best of his misfortune and to be patient for one night.

Now the young slave-girl came to them ; and after having served many bumpers to him, she stepped aside and, in the last cup, mixed a sleeping draught.

Meanwhile the Vizier was absorbed in his own thoughts, saying to himself :

" Although I am deprived this night of my anticipated pleasure, yet when day breaks I can wander here and there in this house, and, by such means, easily gain possession of the proofs named to the husband."

He had reached this stage in his meditation when, thanks to the drug mixed with his wine, he was overtaken by sleep.

Immediately the servant and the slave-girl seized him and carried him to a wine-vault in the garden having a stout door ; and here they left him and locked him in.

The next day, when the sun enthroned in gold against the blue of the sky began to dazzle earth with its rays, the Vizier awakened, regaining a sense of existence in this world of sin, opening his eyes ; and he saw himself in a

PLEASURE AFTER PAIN

vault, and asked himself how this could be. He ran to the door, vainly tried to shake it ; and he sat down in despair.

The lady chanced to be seated in the garden, not far from him ; and she beckoned to the girl and sent her to spy on the Vizier and his doings. And as soon as the Vizier caught sight of the girl through a vent-hole, he began to cry out :

“ Why am I shut in this place ? ” he said.

And the girl answered :

“ The lady was in private talk with you when her brothers arrived from the village ; and she had fear that they might see you, so we carried you into concealment here. Be patient, for we are alone in the place now, you and I, the brothers of the lady having gone away. They spent the night in the house, and, this morning, talked with their sister ; then, when the sun had arisen, they took her with them to the village, because one of them is about to be married. They will be away together for no more than a week.”

At these words the Vizier was stricken in his dismay, utterly confounded ; and he said :

“ What has all this to do with me ? Open the door and let me out ! Would to Allah I had never seen nor heard of you and your mistress ! It is all my own fault, poking my head in such affairs.”

“ My Lord,” the girl answered, “ hold your peace, for pity’s sake. What you ask of me is

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impossible ; for our serving-man takes care of Madam's keys, he has gone away with her, so you must wait till his return. You are too hasty, my Lord Vizier. There are folk who, to reach the summit of their desires, will wait and hope calmly for a year or two. Surely a great noble and a man of wisdom like yourself might have patience for a week ! Now be at peace, and our mistress, on her return, will treat you as if you were her husband."

The Vizier, in his shame and confusion, repeated a couplet to himself :

"One wishes a thing were undone, as a fact ;
For sin's in discovery, and not in the act."

The prisoner was tormented by hunger in his solitude and he felt his strength wane within him. Then the girl came again to the vent-hole ; and she said to him :

"How are you feeling now ? "

He groaned, answering :

"Alas ! why do you keep me shut in this place ? My life oozes out of me here, and the only thing I want is to be off and away. I came to this town merely as a traveller passing by. What do you want from me ? "

"These matters are none of my business," she said ; "but I can give you a piece of advice, if you care to follow it."

"Speak, for my heart and my spirit hang on your words."

"You are troubled with the stubborn notion of getting away from here," she said ; "nor

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will you pay much heed to any of my words. If you like, I can bring you some water. I will pour it down to you from here, and you can stand under it ; for indeed you are very dirty."

He was touched to the quick, and said to her :

" And I will souse the head of an insolent slave with the rest of the water ! "

Then he withdrew to the depth of his cell.

Now the lady had overheard the talk ; and she called to her slave, saying :

" Do not leave him yet ; rouse anger in him again and we can amuse ourselves."

Then the girl returned to the vault.

" My mistress sends her best compliments to Your Highness," she said. " Can you hear me ? "

" May you be accursed ! " he answered, leaving his corner, enraged, " and your lady with you, and her villainous architect ! Thanks to him and my evil star I have been flung into this filthy hole ! "

Now the lady spoke to the girl and to her man-servant, saying :

" What did I tell you ! Here is a direct confirming of my suspicions, and a sign of the protection the Most High grants to a feeble woman ; who is thus warned against her enemies."

Without pause the lady bowed herself to earth and addressed her fervent thanksgivings to the All Powerful, adding :

" Cursed be he who, in hatred of my husband, has contrived all this evil. He would fain have

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corrupted me, had I not been saved by a fortunate device. I will leave the Vizier where he is until I have sure news of my husband."

Once more the girl went to the prisoner; and he, in his abjection, tearfully besought her to set him free.

She said to him :

"As to the opening of the door, you must petition the Most High; for 'tis by His will that you find yourself where you are. But tell me: who was the villainous architect you spoke about just now? Let me hear something of him."

"Tell me rather about the lady, and what has become of her," the Vizier answered.

"But I have already told you! She has gone to a marriage, taking the guardian of the keys with her; and she gave orders that I should not leave the house before her return. Also she said that if any of my friends or kinsmen came to visit me here, she would not allow me any freedom for another year. So I must obey her."

"But how do you manage with her as a rule?" the Vizier said.

"You listen to me," she answered, "and I will tell you the whole story, keeping no secrets from you. Indeed I am ready to do all I can for you; but unhappily I have scarcely any means of aiding you. Know then that the lady is an impudent one in her ardent passions, a wheedler, an artful gossip too, clever at her

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lewd capers and quick to concoct a tale. She has cozened more than a hundred as she has cozened you. The vault where you are was built solely for this purpose ; and it serves her like a net, always ready. You are by no means the first piece of game to be caught down there by reason of such a childish trick ! With her simperings and flatteries she transports her adorers to the highest heaven. Then she teases them and cajoles them, amusing herself, catches the whole lot, and robs them of their silver and their gold. Afterwards, she receives news from her village : her three brothers are on the point of arriving. They are horrid fellows ; and one after another they hurl themselves on the poor dupe, and they beat him and steal all he has on him ; then they fasten a great stone to him and fling him into a bottomless well ; meanwhile I stand terrified, trembling, helpless in face of such doings. . . . I have spoken to you frankly ; and now you in your turn speak frankly to me, telling me from the beginning to the end what you set out to do and why you came to this town. If you are truthful I will put my wits to work and find a means of getting away from this house ; then I will lay hands on all things valuable in the place, I will set you free, and we can escape together.”

“ Alas ! ” the Vizier said, “ I came in quest of pleasure, and I found misery. Dear sister,” he went on, “ if you succeed in delivering me

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from this hole, I give you my solemn word that you shall be exalted into a fine lady and set upon the throne of happiness ; and all I possess, everything within my power, shall be yours."

" If it is as you say," the girl answered, " if you want to gain my confidence, and to see me at work, setting you free, now is the moment to tell me the truth."

Then this contemptible fellow told in detail the promise made by the Viziers and the reasons of his hatred against the architect, together with all that had passed in the presence of the Sultan, and the hope of the journey to Bim.

One can imagine the interest of the lady as she overheard the talk.

" Wait a moment," the girl said to the Vizier, " I must go and get news of our porter and the keys ; and if I can release you, we will away together."

She left him, and returned after a little time.

" Well ! " the Vizier said, " what news of the man ? "

" I am very much afraid we cannot follow your plan for the present," she answered.

" Hear what is happening : the lady's brothers, together with other low fellows, have arrived from their village. They have got drunk, and they are all wild. They pestered me, wanting to know if any person were hidden in the house.

' We shall be away for a month,' they said, ' and when we come back we will find out the truth of this.'

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"I defended myself, declaring that nobody was here; but one of them told me his sister had sent him because in fact there was someone in the place.

" 'And do you think I would agree to upset the arrangements of my friends for nothing?' he said.

"Finally, after a long wrangle, they were stupefied with their drinking and they fell asleep. I am very much afraid that in a month's time they will act towards you as they said; but what could I do, except talk to them as I did?"

At these words the Vizier felt himself beset with fears quite natural to his state; and he said:

"But why cannot we get away to-night?"

"Impossible," she answered; "neither to-night nor to-morrow, nor this week, nor this month."

"But why?"

"Because Madam's brothers and their friends are here, and they are a gang of murderers. 'Tis madness to think of escaping whilst they remain here; nor would there be the slightest chance for me."

And the Vizier said in his despair:

"Then at least bring something to sustain me; for I am tormented by hunger."

"When Madam went from home," the girl answered, "she left great store of yarn and of bread, telling me to have the yarn carded by

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some neighbours ; and I was to pay for the work, giving bread equal in weight to the weight of the yarn carded. ‘ Now work of that kind,’ she told me, ‘ is sought by many folk.’ And so, Your Highness, if this labour is agreeable to you, you shall have the preference : so much bread for so much carded yarn.”

“ Bring the stuff to me at once,” the Vizier said in his hunger : “ so much bread for so much yarn ; and I shall be grateful to you.”

Straightway she went off, and returned with the yarn and the bread, throwing it to him by means of the vent-hole.

Thus a week passed for our man as he carded the yarn and ate the bread.

Whilst these things were happening, the Vizier’s people in the town were without news of him ; and they became restless as no sign of his existence came from him to them.

“ If we stay here,” they said among themselves, “ we shall find ourselves at the end of our provisions. It will be better for us if we go home ; and perhaps we shall meet him on the way.”

“ Maybe,” their headman answered ; “ but in that case we must separate, each one taking a way different from the others.”

Without delay, one loaded his camel, another saddled his horse, and they all set out. Meanwhile the Vizier was occupied incessantly with his yarn ; and the slave-girl continued to cozen him with her sly and artful tales.

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When the Sultan of Guvashir realised that ten days had passed and that his Vizier, in spite of a pledge given, had not returned, he began to ask himself what had befallen the man.

And the second Vizier said to his brethren :

“ Perhaps he loiters, amusing himself with the wife of our enemy ; but he must soon return now.”

A further ten days sped in a fruitless waiting, and the Sultan began to look grim. Then the second of the Viziers asked that he might in turn be allowed to go to Bim.

“ I want to get information as to the actual state of things,” he said.

Again ten days passed in preparation ; and finally the second Vizier took to the road with three of his people, journeying to Bim ; and he spent some time in the town, seeking the quarter where the intriguing old woman lived. And she promised him her services, guessing who he was and why he had come to find her ; but she gave no sign of such knowledge.

“ Always you will find me well disposed to such lordly ones as yourself,” she said to him.

“ A short time ago I was able to help a noble stranger ; and he lavished gifts on me, and left this town satisfied and joyous. I am equally prepared to render all assistance so that your wishes shall be fulfilled.”

The Vizier realised from these words that she spoke of his colleague ; and he said :

“ And where is this noble stranger now ? ”

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“ He left the town when he had made end to his affairs,” she answered ; “ nor do I know what has become of him since then.”

And the Vizier said to himself :

“ No doubt he was attacked while on his journey, and therefore we have no news of him.”

He continued, addressing the old busybody :

“ Dear lady, my intention is to remain in this town several days ; and, like the noble stranger, I wish to take advantage of your services, enjoying myself. Now, as a beginning, introduce me to some beautiful woman.”

And she said to him :

“ Not far from here there lives a charming lady. Her husband, an architect, is away from home. I introduced the traveller your forerunner to her ; and he left the town, much contented. If you agree, I will go to her and speak on your behalf, even as I did for the other.”

“ He was my kinsman,” the Vizier answered ; “ and if you can likewise gain for me the kind attention of this beautiful lady, I will recompense you even as he did.”

The intriguing old woman at once went to the house of the architect’s wife.

“ My dear daughter,” she said to her, “ I bring good news to you. You must admit that you are fortunate. A second traveller has arrived ; one a thousand-fold more rich than the other ; and he is aflame in his anxiety to possess you and to load you with riches. Give

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the word and I will bring presents from him to you."

The lady understood, without further explanation, that the matter concerned a second Vizier who had come in search of news about the first ; and she congratulated herself on this propitious chance.

" My good mother," she said, " if you really wish it I will receive him here ; for we must guard ourselves against lewd gossip and, if he has any affection for me, he will come here alone."

Promptly the old woman hurried away to give this answer to her new client. And he was overjoyed, saying to himself :

" It is already as if I had the proofs, assured to the Sultan, in my hands. The architect is disgraced, and we shall drench him with ridicule."

He gave a parcel of costly stuffs to the old woman ; and she went off with it, and a meeting was arranged for that evening. Our man arrived at the appointed hour ; he was ushered into the house—and it happened to him as it had happened to his predecessor.

When the door of the vault swung on its hinges, the first prisoner fancied that the brothers of the lady and their savage companions had arrived. He crouched in a corner, transfixed with fear, while the second Vizier was thrust into the vault. This done, the bolts to the door were secured once more.

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Now the new arrival, stupefied by the narcotic and prone on the bare earth, did not awaken until the sun poured rays on him through the opening of the vent-hole ; and he discovered himself enclosed in an underground den, and astonished, he sat upright ; and his astonishment redoubled when he recognised his colleague.

“ What are you doing in this place ? ” he said to him.

“ I came down here even as you,” the other answered.

Then he told the whole story to his fellow-prisoner, without forgetting the talks with the slave-girl. He gave account of her deceptions, as if they were so much truth, and spoke of the obstacles to escape raised by the arrival of the brothers and their friends. And the pair began to cry, saying to each other :

“ Hatred and envy have brought trouble on us ; and what will happen to us ? What a calamity ! in spite of our wealth and our high rank too ! ”

Presently the young girl appeared at the vent-hole, coming thus to hear their talk.

“ You there ! ” she said to the first Vizier, “ I have news for you.”

At sight of her the second Vizier uttered a cry of hope ; but her remarks to his colleague confirmed the account he had given to his fellow ; who thought himself lost. And as to the first Vizier, even so to the second ; for hunger gnawed at him.

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“ So much yarn, so much bread,” his colleague said to him ; “ these are the conditions.”

“ Do you think I am going to let a serving-maid cozen me ? ” the other answered. “ That may be all right for you.”

And his colleague said, without anger :

“ Know that a man in possession of power acts in a fashion different from men situated as I tell you we are. He will allow no one to command him ; and so it was with us when we had power. But the case is altered, and we are reduced to dreading the arrival of brigands from the village ; for they are capable of throwing us down and stamping on us if we lack power to resist ; therefore we must strengthen ourselves. If they come to drag us out of this hole, we must be able to defend ourselves, first against stones to be fastened about our necks, and after from being flung into a well. But what can you do if you are starved of food ? ”

The second Vizier was yet engrossed in his reflections on this lamentable subject when the girl came on them unexpectedly. And he said to her :

“ I am tormented by hunger. Help me.”

She answered :

“ When the lady left home for the village, she said to me :

“ ‘ You will give to the one and to the other a weight of bread no greater than the weight of yarn carded by them ; so you will pay each

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one according to his labour.' Now do you agree to these conditions ? ”

And the second Vizier answered :

“ I accept them without question.”

Then the artful creature brought yarn and bread ; and the two friends passed their time in carding the one and eating the other. At any hour of the day the girl came to them, stoking their fears by suggesting the possible arrival of the brigands ; consequently she kept them in a state of unceasing torment, and the blood in them turned sour.

A week went by in this fashion ; and the people of the second Vizier, having had no news of their master, decided to pack their traps and leave the town.

Now after several days, the third Vizier, finding himself without news of the second, took alarm ; and he in turn besought leave of absence from the Sultan ; and after waiting ten days in vain, he too set out for Bim.

All things happened to him as they had happened to the others ; and when he too was lowered into the vault, his colleagues, fearing the brigands, crouched each in his own corner. So, without difficulty, a new prisoner was shut in the vault, and the bolts were fastened securely.

At break of day he regained his senses and found himself enclosed in this narrow den ; and his astonishment was great.

“ Where am I ? ” he said, “ and what has befallen me ? ”

PLEASURE AFTER PAIN

The others, hearing his voice, left their corners and made themselves known to him.

"What are you doing here?" he said to them amazed; "and who has imprisoned me in such a place?"

Then they acquainted him with their troubles; and he, aware of the facts, said to them:

"Truly this woman is cunning and full of guile, having duped us in this fashion. We were foredoomed to fall into this trap, to land ourselves in such a net, thrust here by reason of our own envious thoughts. Alas! it is now impossible to nourish any hope."

He was bathed in his tears.

Then he noticed the yarn spread on the floor of the vault.

"What is that?" he said.

"You will know when you are gnawed by hunger."

As they were talking thus, the young slave came to the vent-hole.

"Hi, you fellows!" she called out to them, "there seems to be a strong smell down there! Are you in need of a bath? I fancy a swill of warm water might do you good."

At this unseemly banter the two first arrivals began to laugh; but a flame of anger blazed in the heart of the third, and to such an extent that he burst out furiously:

"You saucy baggage! You are cruel enough to insult prisoners; but the minute you fall

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into my hands you will learn that I have not forgotten how to avenge myself."

She said to him :

" Why, who has insulted or abused you ? My mistress has gone to her village and has taken the key. No doubt when she comes back she will bestow the wealth of her favours on you, granting all your wishes. Then the pigs will get fed ! But, whilst we await her, tell me exactly what it is you want."

She added to the others :

" Well, my masters ! was it you who made a Vizier of this crazy fellow because of his sagacity ? Truly he had some luck, and may flatter himself on good fortune ; such a very wise man to be raised to the dignity of a Vizier !"

Then she pretended to go away.

The two carders set themselves diligently to their work ; and the third Vizier said to one of them :

" Give me some yarn and I too will work."

The girl heard him, and answered :

" My mistress told me not to give bread to this rebellious fellow if he broke yarn in the carding. Now be careful, and control your hands, which seemingly are too apt to shake with anger ; otherwise they shall touch no bread. Do you understand ? Will you accept these conditions ? "

The miserable fellow, utterly crushed, submitted to all things, and the usual double supplies were brought to him, so much yarn,

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so much bread ; and there the three friends remained, having abundance of work to do, and very little food to eat.

There is no need to say that the attendants of the third Vizier, having lost patience because of their master's prolonged absence, decided to leave the town and return to their several homes.

Whilst these events were happening, the Sultan of Guvashir realised that the time for the return of his Viziers was considerably overdue ; yet no one came, no news reached him. Then he said to himself :

" I must enquire into this affair, and judge the situation with my own eyes."

He disguised himself and, accompanied by three or four faithful horsemen, went to Bim and housed himself at an inn.

News of a stranger's arrival soon spread through the town ; and, shortly after, the old woman came to pay her respects and to present her compliments to the visitor.

" Who are you ? " the Sultan said to her.

He questioned her cunningly, so that he ended by discovering her profession and the services she had rendered to the three Viziers.

" But," he said, " what has happened to them since their going to the lady's house ? "

" I must obey your worship and say that they left the town, one after the other," she answered, " having remained thirty or forty days in all. I satisfied the wishes of one and the other,

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introducing them to the wife of the architect. When they had passed from five days to a week with her in pleasure, they departed one by one, content, grateful for such hospitality."

This explanation did not convince the Sultan ; and he said to himself :

" If they had gone from the town I should have heard of them. The wretched fellows in their hatred certainly wanted to corrupt the wife of the architect. I must go to her, and no later than this night."

After reflection, he added :

" But perhaps she does in fact live as a courtesan ? I must discover the truth of that likewise, though perhaps 'tis only feigning on her part. The Most High may vouchsafe to help me in unravelling the true from the false."

Now he said to the busybody :

" I too wish to meet with the wife of the architect and to prove to myself whether she is as beautiful as folk say. Go and make the needful arrangements."

Then the intriguing creature began a new game ; and finally she took the Sultan to the lady.

Immediately the lady saw him, she divined his rank from his noble bearing and the air of pride and resolution natural to him ; for always he had been obeyed. And she, with a grace not lacking in dignity, begged him to seat himself on the sofa ; and she stood upright, submissive before him.

He signed to her, and she sat down. The girl

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brought sherbert ; and the lady took the cup and presented it to the Sultan. Now came prepared dishes, and the pair supped together ; then, finally, the girl stood before the Sultan and offered wine to him, and he drank.

During the supper, the lady had behaved with a matchless refinement ; nor had the Sultan failed to notice her grace and composure ; in brief, her perfect good-breeding. He said to himself :

“ ’Tis impossible that such a woman should conduct herself lewdly, as folk say.”

And, to test her, he asked her to pledge him in a cup of wine.

“ My brothers will soon be here from the village,” she said, “ therefore in spite of my readiness to do as you wish, you must pardon me ; I cannot consent.”

This answer impressed the Sultan favourably ; in the meantime, he continued to drink his wine. But on this occasion there was no drug ; indeed, on the contrary, the lady overwhelmed her guest with attentions.

The hour of rest drew near ; and suddenly there were violent knockings on the house-door and the lady made show of disquiet.

“ Who is that ? ” the Sultan asked.

“ Your Highness,” she answered, “ here are my brothers, of whom I have spoken.”

“ Where shall I conceal myself ? ”

“ We have a secret chamber in the garden ; and if you really wish it, we will go thither.”

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“ Let us do so,” he said.

The girl, in respect to him, supported him under the armpits, and the lady preceded him with a light ; so they reached the vault. The door was opened and, after the Sultan had passed within, closed again on him. These things took place in silence.

As the Sultan penetrated into the vault, each of the prisoners, half-awake, supposed he was one of their fellows.

“ Now be careful where you put your feet ! ” one of them said to him. “ You are entangling my yarn ! ” another added ; and the third : “ Don’t mix the carded stuff with the rough ! ”

The Sultan was surprised, and he said in a loud voice :

“ Is this place a carder’s workshop or a garden house ? ”

At these words they all stared, recognising each other ; and the Viziers flung themselves at the feet of their Sovereign and gave to him a detailed account of their woeful adventures.

He was indignant, saying :

“ Wretched fellows ! contrivers of fraud ! And so, without regard for your Sultan, you have dared to make foul game of an innocent man honoured by my friendship ! And what is the consequence ? He is tranquil, free from care ; and you, the three of you, suffer torment in prison. Such is the result of your efforts ; such is the example you furnish to the world ! By your calumnies and your treachery you

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would likewise have made your Sovereign a prisoner, if this chaste woman, by the fact of her rare wisdom, had not saved me from your snares. No one had ever spoken ill of her ; her virtue was unharmed, her character without stain ; yet you did violence to her and to her good name ! May it please Heaven to give many such women to the world ! Your punishment ought to serve as an example, wherefore, in the future, no one among the people shall be tempted to slander an upright woman.”

The lady, hearing him speak thus, realised that he was in fact the Sultan, and that she had not been deceived. She gave orders, and her slave-girl, provided with a light, and a large and a small rug, opened the door of the vault and went in ; and she placed the light before the Sultan, and he seated himself on the folded rugs.

Now the lady kissed the ground in front of him, saying :

“ Illustrious Master ! all powerful Lord ! may Heaven grant countless years to your Highness ! Folk say that women are born with natural duplicity, and that ’tis unwise to put faith in their subtleties, since their words and the their acts follow crooked ways. Therefore, just monarch, do not pay too much attention to any ruse that may have been followed in your presence by your most humble servant. I dare to hope you will forgive me.”

“ Truly your discretion outpasses beyond measure all known limits,” the Sultan answered ;

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“and would that all creatures behaved even as you and, like you, observed the way of rectitude, enclosing themselves in the narrow paths of honour and following the rules of strict duty. Your example ought to be remembered when betimes men find themselves in danger of acting dishonourably. The grandeur of spirit you have displayed wins my admiration. But now I must do my duty concerning these rascals ; for, though you and your husband are safe and unharmed, it is in spite of the hateful behaviour of these fellows.”

Now the three Viziers lay with their faces to the earth, and they repeated and elaborated their avowals, beseeching him, calling on the mercy of Heaven to protect them from disgrace and a just punishment ; but the Sultan continued inflexible, refusing all hope to them.

Then the lady, after having once more bowed low before the Sultan, expressing her gratitude, preceded him from the vault ; and the door closed behind them. The Sultan, lighted on his way by the lady, who bore the torch herself, went to the house, passed again to the room where already he had been received, and seated himself. She gave a cup sparkling with ruby wine to him, and remained standing in front of him.

“Lady,” he said, as he drank to her health, “it is not seemly that I should pass the night here ; for in the next world you will take rank as my sister. I must go in quest of my attendants.”

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Forthwith she seized the light and conducted him to the door.

He went from her, and to his quarters, where he rested ; but he yet imagined himself in the house of the lady ; picturing her whom he had pledged with wine ; nor could he forget her faultless manners, her frank appearance, her wisdom, and her demeanour as mistress of her house.

He visited her the next day, after sending presents and thanks to her ; and she welcomed him, honourably and gratefully.

At his command his guard took charge of the three prisoners, and roped them to beasts of burden ; then, all together, they left Bim and took the road to Guvashir. The Sultan reached his capital attended by the good wishes and prayers of the architect's wife ; and the prisoners, according to his instructions, were led to the public square. Here they were strung to the gallows, each one with a placard on his chest affirming him to be an envious fellow and a foul slanderer ; and the facts of their villainy were cried to the people by the bellman.

Finally the three suffered a condign death penalty.

As for the architect, he was summoned to the presence of the Sultan and, by him, loaded with goods and honours ; and he had the title of Vizier conferred on him, likewise the property, slaves, houses and lands of the three Viziers ;

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everything, even to the beasts of burden, the flocks and the crops.

Meanwhile his wife was brought to Guvashir and housed in a palace fit to serve as a dwelling for *genii*, or even for nymphs of Paradise ; and, in addition, the Sultan gave the superintendence of his own harem to her. Hence the architect exercised the authority of a Vizier outside the palace ; and within, his wife ruled over female-slaves and men-servants.

Now at last the Sultan summoned the Vizier to the palace, and confronted him with his wife ; and one may readily imagine the surprise and pleasure of the pair. They were transported with joy, content, grateful to Heaven ; nor were they ever again parted one from the other.

So ends the tale of the adventures of the architect, his wife and the three Viziers. May Allah be gracious and merciful to them ; for their history remains in the memory of all people and abounds with instruction useful to each one of us.

And now may the divine compassion rest on the author, the translator, the reader, and on all who listen.

Chapter Three

Taher and His Brethren

THE CALIPH Haroun-el-Raschid was in talk with his Vizier, Fasl-ben-Rebia on occasion ; and he said to him, shewing three magnificent diamonds great in brilliance, exactly alike and of inestimable value :

“ Have you ever seen three such beautiful stones ? ”

“ Prince of the Faithfull ! ” the Vizier answered, “ forgive the high liberty I take, but at Basra there lives a certain merchant named Taher, whom I know ; and he has many diamonds of a more splendid beauty.”

“ You are telling tales,” the Caliph said.

“ By my faith, Sire ! I speak truth. Furthermore, I can vouch that the merchant is famous for his modesty.”

At these words, Haroun began to laugh.

“ Verily,” he said, “ his modesty is yet more astounding than his diamonds ! ”

“ If you do not believe me,” the Vizier answered, “ well well ! let me send for him.”

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And by command of the Caliph, Taher was brought from Basra and given audience before the Caliph; who regarded him closely, pleased, interested by his appearance; and Haroun said to himself:

“Let us see now if his words are in harmony with his looks.”

He added to Taher:

“My young man, have you ever seen three diamonds comparable to these of mine?”

“May the Caliph live for ever!” Taher answered, “and may prosperity abide with him! But his humble servant has thirty diamonds more beautiful than these.”

This said, from a box he produced thirty diamonds of the first water and of amazing lustre; at sight of which the Caliph and his court were enraptured. And Haroun said:

“Now I wish to put a question to you.”

“I hear and obey, my Lord!”

“Well then!” the Caliph added, “so far as I can judge you are a man of penetration, instructed and well brought up; yet, to me, you do not seem to enjoy a perfect contentment, but rather to be prey to some trouble. Like the elephant, the lion and the tiger, these lords of creation, lacking neither in vigour nor in power, who are nevertheless not free from secret melancholy, you appear to me troubled, in despite of the flavour of serenity involved in your name Taher¹. Now why is that?”

¹ Taher means happy.

TAHER AND HIS BRETHREN

“ Oh you whom the Most High has chosen to rank above Kings ! it may be that no other of the faithful has ever endured such great misfortunes as have befallen me ; for not one among men has been so tossed to and fro by the hand of Fate and in a fashion so strange ; indeed, such alternation between good and evil fortune has never been heard of before ! Your Highness, suffer me to acquaint you with my story in full, thus to answer your demand.

“ My father was a rich merchant of Basra named Asim ; and I had three brothers.

“ After his death, we divided his property ; and my brothers, given to dissipation and debauch, lost no time in squandering their share. As for me, I set myself to increase my small fortune, and by degrees I succeeded in enriching myself. In brief, a time came when I found myself even more wealthy than my father. My brothers were impoverished, reduced to the most distressing shifts ; and they could not tell how to recover from their misery. At last I invited them to my house and gave a thousand pieces of gold to each of them, saying :

“ ‘ I wish you to come away with me, I will act on your behalf, and we will share our gains in equal parts ; for I mean that you shall be as prosperous as any other merchants of this town.’

“ They rejoiced exceedingly and overpressed me with gratitude.

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“ Soon after, I had a vessel fitted out and lavishly stored with merchandise and provisions ; then we embarked and set sail. One night, when about ten days had passed at sea, my brothers stole advantage as I slept, seized me and flung me overboard, hoping by this means to become masters of the ship and its cargo. Fortunately I was able to grasp a plank and to keep myself afloat. And when day broke, I could see no sign of anything on the immensity of the sea. Five days and five nights sped thus for me, and I had not food nor drink ; and then I spied land, and was floated on my plank to the shore, where I set foot. During an entire day and night I trudged inland, and then I noticed a spring, reached it with much difficulty ; and near to it I fell in my exhaustion. Here I was discovered by some sailors, who revived me ; and I spoke to them of my ship and of my brothers.

“ ‘ Perhaps,’ they said, ‘ it has arrived at the neighbouring port.’

“ ‘ But where are we ? ’ I asked them.

“ ‘ On an island in length and breadth a *para-sang*.¹ It is named the Isle of Anqa, and has a notable town where the Kings live ; for we have two Kings who are brothers, exercising power alternately.’

“ They gave nourishment to me, then took me with them, making their way to the town of which they had spoken. My brothers were

¹ A Persian measure.

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there, lodged in a caravansary. I went to them, and found them much changed, dressed as they were in my best raiment. They were considerably surprised to see me, and they feigned ignorance of me. However, I questioned them, saying :

“ ‘What have you done with my goods ?’ ”

“ They surrounded me, shouting one louder than the other :

“ ‘Vagabond, scoundrel, impudent fellow ! What have you entrusted to us ? What goods do you mean, you who assuredly have never possessed anything ?’ ”

“ I was bewildered ; and they made profit of my state, fell on me with their cudgels, rained blows on me, then took me to the King, fainting as I was and out of my senses. And after they had spread costly gifts on the royal carpet, one of them said to him :

“ ‘Sire, may it be granted to you to travel thousands of miles at your ease on the highway of prosperity, and may all your virtues be equitably and truly rewarded ! Know then that this wretched thief now brought before you, hailing from what land no man can tell, came to us and assailed us with his lying pretensions, claiming the right to demand from us all that we possessed.’ ”

“ Then the King said to his courtiers :

“ ‘Who is this man ?’ ”

“ ‘We cannot tell whence he comes,’ they answered.

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“ Then the King said to his Vizier :

“ ‘ What shall we do with him ? ’

“ ‘ We must fling him into the hell-hole,’ the Vizier answered.

“ By the hell-hole he meant a pit at least two hundred feet deep, cut vertically in rock, narrow at the top, and able to hold five hundred men in its lower depths ; and, although situated near to the sea, no one could catch sight of it from the shore, nor had any of the criminals thrust into it ever been able to escape.

“ On the order of the King, the guards dragged me to the pit and lowered me into this dungeon. Once entombed, I thought myself lost beyond all hope, and I wept. There I remained during two or three days and as many nights without food. And at the end of this time I heard a light rustling above me. I looked in the direction of the sound ; and you may imagine my astonishment when at a certain height I could see a young and attractive woman.

“ ‘ What are you doing up there ? ’ I said to her.

“ ‘ And you, what are you doing down there ? ’ she said to me.

“ ‘ It is because of my brothers that I find myself here,’ I answered.

“ ‘ And how can that be ? ’

“ Then I gave a brief account of my adventures to her.

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“Prince of the Faithful,” Taher went on, addressing the Caliph, “it is now essential that I give in full the story of my Life.

“As I have already said, I am the son of a reputable merchant, and I have an elder brother of whom I have not yet spoken. On the death of our father, he received his share even as the others; and like them, he squandered his fortune whilst I, on the contrary, added to mine; and after some time I held the rank formerly enjoyed by my father among the merchants. When I saw my brother reduced to misery, I took pity on him. I led him to my house, supplied his many wants, and eventually allowed him to share all the advantages of my position. For a considerable time we lived in a complete agreement. These things happened in that same Isle of Anqa.

“One day, as I walked in the slave-bazaar, I noticed a young virgin, and I was allured by her charms. I bought her, paying ten thousand pieces of gold, and took her home. But seemingly she did not love me; she recoiled from me, refusing to make a father of me. Yet I was unwilling to be harsh with her; and so I determined to be patient. In the midst of all this, I had to go on a voyage, leaving to time the solution of difficulties with my slave, confiding her and my house and the care of all my interests and goods to my brother. This done, I took shipping. A whole year passed before I returned to the Isle of Anqa; and

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during this time, always I was preoccupied with thought of my young slave.

“ When I found myself on this isle once more, and by means of the events I have but now related to you, I learned many things.

“ Scarcely three days had gone by after my departure, when my brother began to torment the young girl ; and, because of her resistance, and in spite of his repeated attempts, never had he been able to have his will of her. Shortly after my going away, my brother had audience with the King ruling the country at that time.

“ ‘ Illustrious Prince,’ he said to him, ‘ I am unfortunate enough to be plagued by a worthless brother of low principles ; moreover he is a trickster, a thief, and treacherous. Heaven showered benefits on me, but he despoiled me of them all. One day, he said to me : “ I have a slave to sell, unmatched in her beauty ; and her little finger alone is worth ten thousand pieces of gold.” Whereupon I counted and gave to him this sum in payment for the girl. Now he pretends that she belongs to him, and demands that I shall return her to him. Sire, it is for you to protect me against such practice ; otherwise I shall find myself robbed beyond all aid. The audacity of this fellow is such that he threatens to come with a gang of villains like himself in order to gain possession of the slave.’

“ The Prince gave attention to these accusations ; and he said to my brother :

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“ ‘ Be tranquil.’

“ Forthwith he instructed some of his people ; and they led the slave to the palace.

“ Shortly after I had learned these facts, and whilst I felt extremely troubled by such news, I was flung into the hell-hole, by reason of the intrigue of which I have given the details to you.

“ ‘ Alas ! ’ I said to myself, ‘ to what state am I reduced ! I must forego all hope. In truth, this is the end of me ! ’

“ As I have told you, for three days and three nights I lay downcast in the pit. Finally, at night, the tide almost reached me ; and as it ebbed slowly I remarked how it left a track as it retreated, and I profited thereby. At that moment, as I advanced in the water, I noticed the woman of whom I have already spoken to you ; and when I had informed her of my situation, she said to me :

“ ‘ Now take hold of this fishing-net.’

“ At once I attached myself to the net ; and I could feel myself being drawn upward. Then she said to me :

“ ‘ Wait whilst I disentangle the net.’

“ I waited obediently ; then, near to her now, I saw in my saviour the beautiful and faithful slave left by me to the care of my brother. She too recognised me ; and we wept together and questioned one another. She said to me :

“ ‘ No doubt you are aware that I passed

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from your brother's hands into the hands of the elder of the two King-brothers ; and my sorrow was so great that I could neither eat nor drink nor sleep ; for the Prince did not cease from pestering me by words or attentions in his passion ; but he could not succeed. However, he was not discouraged, and he gave servant-slaves and eunuchs to me, saying to them :

“ “ “ Take your mistress to walk in the park and the gardens ; and perhaps the sight of roses and the like flowers will distract her, and she may look more kindly on me.”

“ “ “ In accord with these commands I was taken to the park each day, amongst the flower-beds ; and so, and without avail, the folk tried to enliven me.

“ “ “ One day, as I chanced to be alone in the park, wandering sadly under the trees, haunted by the conviction of my wretched plight, I met a young negro ; and he wished to take advantage of the occasion, and of me. Then I was inspired on a sudden ; and I said to him :

“ “ “ Wait ! I will come here in quest of you at nightfall.”

“ “ “ I arrived punctually at the place of meeting ; and now I said to him :

“ “ “ Let us not stay here. We will go from sight of the palace ; and alone together at the edge of the sea we shall be more at our ease.”

“ “ “ He held to his first notion, and I could make no impression on his obstinacy, in spite of

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my plea. A little time before dawn, and when this imbecile had left me, I determined to act alone. There was a mausoleum in the park, guarded only by an old fellow and his wife ; and its roof-terrace reached to the coping of the ramparts. I climbed to the ramparts, leapt down, and so escaped. Soon after, a caravan drew near and pitched camp not far from me. I went to the tents ; and judge of my surprise when I recognised my brothers.¹ Immediately they saw me, they rushed on me and belaboured me, leaving me half dead. And the camel-drivers said to them :

“ “ “ Why do you behave in this way ? ”

“ “ One of my brothers answered :

“ “ “ She is a thief who has played a thousand tricks on us, all deserving the gallows.”

“ “ The camel-drivers were content with this explanation, and took no further notice of us ; and I was left prone on the ground throughout that day. When night came, my brothers sent a eunuch to me, and thought no more about me, going off with their fellow-travellers. The eunuch set me against a tree, drew his sword, slashed at me ; and he too went away. I was drenched in my own blood ; I could feel my strength ebbing from me, even as the flow of my life-blood ; and I lay unconscious until after daybreak. By and by I

¹ In “ Taher and His Brethren,” wicked brothers are frequently introduced in the several tales. This is all in line with the main story.

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opened my eyelids and saw myself surrounded by about fifty women ; and, in the midst of them, a noble Lord on horseback, richly dressed and wearing a coronet of gold set with precious stones. He looked compassionately on me. . . . I have since learned that he was one of the two ruling Kings, the younger brother of the one from whom I had escaped . . . He said to a matron who stood nearby :

“ “ My good mother, we must give succour to this unhappy stranger. Staunch the blood and bind her wounds.”

“ “ The women, instructed by the matron, came to me, laved my wounds, closed and bandaged them. Then the young Lord sent for a splendid horse ; and I was placed on its back, a servant led it forward, and we set off, the rest following ; nor could I tell whither we were going nor with whom I journeyed. Eventually we reached a superb park in the midst of which stood a castle ; and here they helped me to alight. A young lady came from the castle ; and she had me carried to a bed. Now all sorts of cares were lavished on me : medicines and cordials were given to me, and my wounds were dressed ; in short, there was no sparing of anything to my recovery. Again and again the young man of whom I have spoken, so royal in his deportment, came to assure himself that I progressed towards health. If there is any gratitude for his kindness and attention in me, as there ought

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to be, never will my spirit lose the memory of the joyous moments spent in company of my dear master. By and by I recovered, and my strength returned to me. Then he said :

“ “ Since now you are in health, perhaps you will consent to tell me who you may be.”

“ “ Only the most High,” I answered, “ ordains the course of events, the endless vicissitudes, and knows the purpose of existence ; which is to say, my Master, that the tale of my woes is long. Yet, if you so desire, I will give you my history in writing.”

“ “ He agreed ; and when he read of my strange adventures, he was greatly amazed. I had not mentioned my actual origin, having reason for withholding this fact. He said to me :

“ “ “ My dear friend, if until now you have suffered only sorrow and bitterness, be assured as to the future ; for you need but remain here to be sheltered henceforth from all things hostile to you.” ”

“ My young slave, having reached this point in her tale, changed the subject and began to speak of her origins.

“ “ Know that I am the daughter of a King,’ she said, ‘ and a kinswoman of the King-brothers, although they are ignorant of that fact ; one of whom has had you flung into this hell-hole. I am named Qamr-el-Behar.’ Sultans and Kings of the sea have sought to

¹ Moon of the Sea.

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espouse me ; and, at my behest, they would have hurled themselves into the cavern of death willingly. A single vexed glance from me sufficed to pierce their hearts and to fill their eyes with tears. But, before meeting you, I felt no inclination whatsoever for any man. At sight of you I knew that you had conquered me ; nor have any of your kindnesses been lost on me, for always I have been loyal to you, and grateful.’

“ Ere she could speak another word, I fell at her feet, saying :

“ ‘ Beautiful Princess, unmatched in virtue, you cannot tell how you fill my heart with great joy ; for never did I hope to attain such happiness. And so you make end to my torments and open a new life to me,’

“ Immediately my lover clothed me in woman’s raiment ; for she had come to the edge of the sea with the women of the harem, in order to enjoy the pleasures of bathing and fishing ; and the slaves remained a little apart from her, and clothes were many and to hand. . . . She led me to the park, in company with the rest of the women ; and thence I went to the palace, where she assigned a room to me. Here, day and night she came to me ; and we rejoiced together in the delights reserved for two devoted lovers. I had ceased to remember my former miseries.

“ Nevertheless, we had not yet drained the bitter cup of woe : an infamous creature was

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about to make an end to our happiness. The place where I remained hidden had a window that projected on to the terrace serving as roof to the palace. One of the Prince's slave-girls came to walk on this same terrace ; and she saw us as we were engrossed in our amorous rites. Without pause she hastened to instruct the young King who had given shelter to my friend. He ran to our window, saw us together, and sent for his Vizier ; to whom he said :

“ ‘ Look you ! We must call for our people, and order the instant slaughter of these twain.’ ”

“ And the Vizier answered :

“ ‘ Gently, my noble Master. It is the business of Kings to act only after full knowledge of the facts. These young people may be drunk with wine, therefore incapable of realising what they do ; nor is it yet clear that they are deserving of death. Give them time to find their wits, then question them and discover the motives at work in them. When you are aware of the truth, then you will know what should be done ; and after having so considered all the facts, you can make decision without fear of injustice. ’Tis only when you are acquainted with all and every circumstance that you will be able to act without fear of self-deception—apart from mistakes always and at least possible among men.’ ”

“ The young King, submissive to the advice of his Vizier, was content to send his guards to

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us; and they bound our hands. No words could describe my bewilderment when I found myself and my beloved in this plight.

“ ‘ Alas ! ’ she exclaimed, ‘ our happiness was too great, and we ought to have foreseen a revival of our piteous fate.’ ”

“ She had not ceased to speak when the King entered, carrying his sword and followed by the Vizier ; who sat himself down at ease on the edge of the bed. And the King gazed on me, fury in his eyes, saying :

“ ‘ Scoundrel ! What has brought you to my palace ? ’ ”

“ Then the lady Qamr-el-Behar answered :

“ ‘ Sire, it is I who persuaded him to come here, and almost in despite of himself. If there is wrong-doing, I am to blame ; and if punishment is due, let it fall on me, for there is no fault in him.’ ”

“ Then the King said, addressing his Vizier :

“ ‘ Look at this hussy ! And she dares speak thus to me ! ’ ”

“ The Vizier answered :

“ ‘ Maybe she speaks truth ; and anyhow, there is a certain nobility of spirit in her. She is overpowered by love, and so would make sacrifice of her own being. These things are manifest, and love is not an unpardonable sin. To-day, and a week hence, we shall be equally embarrassed in distinguishing the true from the false. Let us therefore free ourselves from such embarrassments by freeing ourselves of

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this pair. Allow them to go off together, without aid and without defence ; and if they are blameless, fate will succour them.'

" Presently the King, persuaded and appeased, congratulated his Vizier and gave him full liberty to do whatsoever he should think best in his dealings with us. And the Vizier had us taken to his house, where we spent the night and the next day ; then we were placed in a skiff and told to be off. We let ourselves drift at hazard, without direction and without aim.

" At the end of five or six days, we met a small vessel, manned by pirates ; who boarded us, took possession of my friend, carried her to their boat, and left me in our skiff after having bound me.

" When the pirates had gazed at the face of my friend, fire ran in their veins and they quarrelled together, no one of them ready to give way to another ; and the dispute reached a summit, they took to blows, and with such ferocity that soon only one was left. Then he said to my friend :

" ' Who was that fellow with you ? '

" ' He is my master,' she answered.

" ' To the devil with him ! '

" The pirate then dropped into my skiff, and cut the tow-line ; and presently his boat vanished from sight, carrying the better part of myself.

" By and by his vessel reached an island, where he landed ; and here he determined to

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take possession of my slave. And she said to him :

“ ‘ Wait a little. Before we are united I must tell you that I am dying of hunger ; for there can be no enjoyment when one is famished. Once we have refreshed ourselves we will search for some lonely place, where we can be at ease.’ ”

“ Thereupon the pirate sought provisions from his boat ; and during his absence, my beautiful one extracted a virulent poison from the tincture of her eyebrows, using a moistened finger for this purpose. When the pirate returned to her, she took a slice of pastry from his hand, then offered it to him, simpering meanwhile ; and scarcely had the wretched fellow swallowed it before he gave up his soul to his master Satan. Then she climbed into the boat and put out to sea. And after some days’ sailing she reached land, made anchor, and took to the shore. She found herself on an island abounding in fruits, and ate of them ; then, since the place was lonely, she lay on the grass and fell asleep.

“ As for me—daunted as I was for my friend, and my own fate—I spent two days, which seemed so many years, tossed on the waves in my skiff, where I lay bound hand and foot. At the end of this time, a large ship carrying numerous merchants drew near ; and the sailors took me on board. Hardly had I set foot on the deck when I recognised my brothers

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as they stood near to the ship's braces ; and I was full of dread. They too recognised me ; whereupon, despite their amazement at seeing me here, they made resolve and, without hesitation, belaboured me with blows.

"At this unexpected scene, the rest of the folk said :

" ' Who is this man ? Why do you treat him thus ? ' "

"And my brothers answered :

" ' He is a pirate and a rogue. He was in league with other scoundrels of the sort in an island of the Ganges. He stole our money, murdered our kinsmen, and took possession of our goods. Then he hailed us before an Indian King, accusing us of all sorts of crimes. The King commanded that we should be put to death ; but the executioner was content only to wound us, and to rob us of our clothing. So we escaped from this dreadful pass. Such are his crimes, and we are determined to have his blood ; for he has spilled the blood of our kindred. These are his doings. Now judge yourselves of the punishment he deserves. Death alone is a worthy reward for his sins. ' "

"Then the others disputed, raising their voices together ; but finally they reached an agreement. And they said :

" ' It is forbidden to inflict the death penalty at sea, and we are resolved that his blood shall not be on our heads. Soon we shall reach the Isle of Irem, so be patient till we are there. "

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Once arrived, either you can pass judgment yourselves, or you can take a less perilous way and deliver him to the King; who will decide on his fate alike for piracy and for roguery.'

"When they had so spoken they freed me from the hands of my enemies.

"Immediately the ship entered the port, the merchants landed and went their several ways. And as my brothers were taking a stroll and admiring the charming sights of the Isle of Irem, they came on my beloved as she sat near to a spring. And they said to her:

" 'Why, most beautiful lady, are you here alone so far from the town?'

" 'I am a very unfortunate stranger and separated from my husband,' she answered.

"She told them the facts, briefly. Then they realised her identity, took charge of her and led her to their ship.

"Her amazement was great when she beheld me bound on the deck; however, I made signs of warning to her, and she remained silent. And as soon as my brothers had gone about their own affairs on shore, she came to me, saying:

" 'Alas, my dear friend! what has befallen you?'

"Then I told the tale of my recent woes, she gave account of her own troubles since the moment of our separation; and we spent the rest of the day together in talk.

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“ My brothers passed the night in a tavern on the island ; and the next morning they began to discuss their situation, saying :

“ ‘ What shall we do with this daughter of the King of the Ganges ? In order that she may be useful to us in our designs on our brother, we will offer her as a gift to the King of Irem.’

“ Presently they collected their offerings and went before the King ; who welcomed them graciously. My brothers spoke to him of the Indian Princess, and in such terms that promptly he waxed amorous, deeply moved, trembling as if he had been sick for a year, so impatient was he to be given a sight of this young beauty. They brought her to him ; and in his astonishment at her charm and grace he showered presents on my brothers. They took profit of the occasion to mention me to him, saying :

“ ‘ This pirate has robbed us of our money ; he has murdered our kinsmen and has stolen all our goods.’

“ ‘ Deliver him to me,’ the King answered, ‘ he shall swing from the end of a rope, unless the birds sever the strands.’

“ Without further delay my brothers placed me in the hands of the King ; then they withdrew, took ship and set sail.

“ Thenceforth the passion of the King for the lovely Princess grew day by day ; yet she granted no favour to him in spite of his many

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attentions and petitions. Then came a day when he said to himself :

“ ‘ Since I cannot have my will of her by gentleness, I mean to use force.’ ”

“ And he said to her :

“ ‘ My beloved, you must cease to regard me with contempt. Do not imagine that I intend to await your favours, impassive as the stones on the road. Do not think that I shall let you make game of me without end ; for I have power at command.’ ”

“ ‘ Dear Master,’ she answered ironically, ‘ your sword does not appear to me tempered finely enough to promote great fear in me ; truly, would it slice so much as a beetroot ? ’ ”

“ These words enraged the King. He called aloud to his guard :

“ ‘ Run to the prison and fetch one of the prisoners. We shall see if my good sword can or cannot cut.’ ”

“ The guard hastened to the prison ; and they chose me from among the condemned. They bound my hands and haled me before the King.

“ Now imagine the dismay of the lady Qamrel-Behar as she recognised me !

“ When I had been pressed to my knees in front of the King, he grasped his sword, saying :

“ ‘ Now my fair one, you shall see if my sword will cut ! ’ ”

“ Meanwhile I had not lost all hope ; and, in fact, my beloved took the word :

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“ ‘My Master,’ she said, ‘do you think to pleasure me by beheading this unhappy man before my eyes? Perhaps a way of touching my heart would be to take pity on an innocent man rather than to cut off his head.’

“ Scarcely had the King heard these words before he gave orders for me to be unbound ; and I was clothed and set free.

“ In spite of this, I did not yet feel at ease, troubled as I was by disquiet for my friend. Each day I wandered round and about the palace, hoping by chance to gather news of her.

“ One day, an old fellow of the guard addressed me affably, saying :

“ ‘Young man, what is it that attracts you hereabouts, and why is it that never do you go from view of the palace?’

“ ‘My good man,’ I said to him, ‘do you know the lengths youth will travel in the way of fidelity?’

“ ‘I shall be pleased to hear,’ he answered.

“ ‘But my experience is a profound secret, unknown to anyone.’

“ ‘Fear not : a secret confided to me shall not cross my lips ere I give up the ghost.’

“ Then I told him the whole story ; and the good old fellow bit at his nails in deep emotion as he listened to me ; and he began to weep. He reflected a while, then said to me :

“ ‘Assuredly you alone cannot dupe the King ; but if you will listen to me, we may be able to devise some way of success.’

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“ ‘ Please Allah that it shall be so ! ’ I said.

“ ‘ Well well,’ he answered, ‘ follow me.’

“ Now he rose and led me to the edge of the sea.

“ ‘ Look there ! ’ he said.

“ I did as he bade me, and noticed a small island overgrown with trees ; nor has the Most High ever created a sight more pleasant to the eye.

“ The old soldier continued :

“ ‘ Know that we call it the Isle of Paradise ; and it is inhabited by an enchantress named Chemset.’ All the Kings whose states adjoin this sea are subservient to her, nor is there one who would dare to disobey her. Now you must instruct her of all that has befallen you, and to the least detail ; then give yourself wholly to her commands, because, if you are quite honest with the enchantress Chemset, she will understand the whole of your difficulties ; if you place yourself entirely in her hands, if you please her, she will fulfill all your desires, and in strict accord with the facts given by you. Now rejoice with hand and heart at what must ensue ; for no matter how rich and eminent your brothers may be, nor how great their cunning and trickery, they will be forced to give account to you ; and, by the same token, your beloved will be restored to you.’

“ I thanked the old fellow even as he deserved thanks. He found a skiff and furnished it with provisions.

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“On the morrow, as soon as dawn broke, I set sail, reached the island, moored my skiff and went ashore. Groves of ornamental and fruit-laden trees opened to my view ; nor ever had I seen a place so alluring. All things were verdant : sandalwood, planes, ebony and mastic, shadowed lawns enamelled with roses, hyacinth, tulips, basil, narcissus, the perfumed cornflower, saffron, jasmin, jonquils and aloes. As I advanced, I was surprised and enraptured at such a wealth of beauty ; then I saw a meadow, and, at its extremity, a graceful castle wrought like a piece of golden filigree. At each side of the door stood a young maiden clothed in brocade of gold and wearing jewels set with precious stones, the like of which had never been seen before. I went to the door, hesitating a little ; and I crossed the threshold, passed through a vestibule, raised a curtain and entered a spacious apartment. It was furnished with gold and silver-legged divans, with sofas lining each of the four walls on which many artists had exercised their talents ; and, at the centre of each sofa, a high cushion of gold-woven brocade served as a throne, and stools ornamented with costly stones stood to the right and to the left.

“I advanced to one of these thrones, and seated myself on a stool, my legs crossed under me ; then, tired of waiting, I changed my position, going to one of the thrones. Soon after, much disquieted, I let my feet swing

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down towards the floor. As I glanced here and there, I noticed a golden chain that hung in a corner ; which, I supposed, served as a bell. I pulled it ; and it twined itself around my hands and belly and legs like a serpent and I could not free myself. As I reflected on what might happen to me, I heard a low voice from outside saying :

“ ‘ Hi ! you fellow ! what bad thoughts urged you to play such a prank as that ? ’ ”

“ I turned my head and saw a monstrous dragon, from which I could not escape ; for I was bound hand and foot. The monster entered the room, sat itself on a throne, and again addressed me, saying :

“ ‘ Why have you behaved in this fashion ? ’ ”

“ ‘ All Powerful One,’ I answered, ‘ there was no evil design on my part : I acted only thoughtlessly. I am a stranger here, and therefore, as such, I have perhaps behaved blindly ; nor have I followed any precise notion. May your anger give place to gentleness ! Deign for pity’s sake to forgive my blunder ! ’ ”

“ ‘ What do you want here ? ’ ”

“ ‘ I am the victim of love, of fidelity to a most beautiful young maiden,’ I said. ‘ If you will hear me, I will tell my story to you.’ ”

“ Suddenly I saw the dragon quiver ; and in a trice it ceased to be a dragon and became a lady. She said to me :

“ ‘ Do not be afraid ; for whatsoever I undertake, I accomplish.’ ”

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“ She murmured a charm ; and forthwith I was liberated from the accursed chain, recovering my freedom. With a motion of the hand she invited me to the sofa, and I sat down. She gave orders, and a meal was served, meats and drinks following in succession ; then we talked, and I told her of my numerous adventures. When I spoke of my imprisonment, she began to weep, saying :

“ ‘ Never, never in my life have I heard of such things.’

“ And she added, on hearing the end of my tale :

“ ‘ Take comfort. I will deliver you from this King of Irem, who has enslaved the daughter of the King of the Ganges ; and I will place you on the throne of Irem. Please Allah, this shall be done straightway.’

“ At these words I made obeisance to Chemset, thanking her. She rose, climbed to the upper terrace of the castle ; and she cried out in a loud voice so that the whole island resounded. Then thousands of elephants and tigers and leopards and wolves and lions and bears and wild-boars and wild-dogs and jackals and foxes came thronging in droves toward the castle. I was horrified at this invasion and searched for a way of escape. Chemset said to me :

“ ‘ Be tranquil ; for these are my soldiers, who, on hearing my cry, run hither to receive orders. Do not leave the palace,’ she added, ‘ but go and wait in the small, barred chamber over the doorway. As for me, I am away with

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my troops to the King of Irem's capital ; and the country shall be conquered for you.'

" I did as she bade me ; and from the chamber I saw a lion as large as an elephant commanding the guard of countless wild beasts in the garden. Then I looked towards the Isle of Irem. The King had not suffered himself to be taken unawares ; for he had armed himself and was advancing with his human army to meet the droves of wild beasts. The fight continued without pause for a day and a night ; and eventually victory fell to the troops of the enchantress, who captured the King. The unfortunate Princess of the Ganges was brought to me and I saw that her bosom rose and fell under the drive of her emotion. Hardly had she recognised me when she flung herself at my feet ; and she looked searchingly at me, then held me in her arms and kissed me, such was the magnitude of her joy and of her astonishment. Afterwards, I received deputies from the people of Irem, and introduced myself to them as their King ; I made a Vizier of the old fellow of the guard, my benefactor, had the treasure-chest opened and drew up a list of all that it contained.

" Soon after I left the Isle of Paradise to go to the Isle of Irem, accompanied by my faithful lady Qamr-el-Behar, the Princess of the Ganges, by my nobles and my chief officers ; nor did I take leave of Chemset without being loaded with her favours. She said to me :

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“ ‘May you have a son who shall succeed you on the throne of Irem !’

“ ‘Then she called for the King of Irem and had him torn to pieces by her lions ; after which she said to the lady Qamr-el- Behar :

“ ‘Since hitherto you have suffered nothing but woes, I long to afford you some pleasure, wherefore you may have joyous memory of our meeting. I shall treat you as a daughter to whom I wish to make bridal-gifts.’

“ ‘This said, she presented my lady with the thirty incomparable diamonds ; these, my Lord Caliph, which you have but now so much admired, the like whereof are not to be found elsewhere in the whole world.

“ ‘Then Chemset turned to me, saying :

“ ‘Nor shall you leave me empty-handed. Take these two phials, since they will be useful to you. In the one, as you see, there is a green liquid ; in the other, a red. If you put a drop of the green in the food of any man, at once he will lose human shape at your command and will take whatsoever form you may choose. The red liquid, employed in like fashion, will restore him to his former shape.’

“ ‘Now I took leave of Chemset, armed with the two phials ; and, followed by all my people, I went to the Isle of Irem and there installed myself as King.

“ ‘Some time passed and I began to feel teased by a yearning to see my own country and my

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kinsmen once again. Qamr-el-Behar had divined my longings. She said to me :

“ ‘It is not for nothing that Chemset bestowed her gifts on us.’

“ ‘Assuredly,’ I answered ; ‘and therefore I fear some ill-fortune may befall us if we do not make use of them. Now in order to avoid such danger, I think we ought to return to my country ; and there we will establish ourselves in peace, if Allah so wills. This I believe is the best thing we can do.’

“ Qamr-el-Behar approved of my design ; and I came to an agreement with my Vizier Mourshid, the old soldier, and loaded him with gifts ; and each day I increased his powers, nor could I have found a more loyal servant. And so I entrusted the kingdom to his care, and, having provided myself with all things needful, not forgetting the diamonds and the phials, I took ship with my attendants at night. In a few days, and after a serene voyage, I reached Bagdad. My fellow-countrymen were speechless with astonishment at sight of me ; and I went to my paternal home, whence my brothers were then absent. I said to my neighbours :

“ ‘They will be welcome on their return ; for I have overlooked all our old quarrels.’

“ By and by I was told of the arrival of my brothers ; and I set out to meet them, surrounded by my people.

“ On seeing me they were dumbfounded and abashed.

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“ ‘Well well,’ I said to them, ‘we have grown older, each and all of us.’

“Then they made pretence of joy at our return, as if here were a meeting of true friends. And now we went together to the house, and I introduced Qamr-el-Behar to them, and had food served forthwith.

“A first dish came my way; and secretly I poured a drop of the green liquid into it. My brothers began to eat of it; and scarcely had they swallowed a mouthful when I cried aloud:

“ ‘Be transformed into dogs!’

“The change took place on the instant; and I drove them away with kicks. They fled, and passed a whole year wandering here and there, feeding themselves on garbage and sleeping in ruins.

“At the end of this time, and on the day of the feast of Asnaf, or of Forgiveness, I felt compassion well in me at thought of them; for I believed they had amply atoned for their crimes. Then I gathered them together in my house, had plenteous food given to them, put dog-cloths on their backs and collars of gold about their necks and dainty bracelets around their paws; and they seemed content with their lot and devoted to their master.

“There!” Taher said at the end of his long tale; “and now you know how I recovered my Qamr-el-Behar, and how the diamonds you see came to be mine.”

Haroun appeared at once satisfied and

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astonished ; and he expressed his sentiments to Taher, adding :

“ Young man, there is yet one request I would make to you.”

“ Prince of the Faithful, I hear and obey,” Taher answered.

“ Well,” Haroun said, “ your brothers the pirates and the King of Irem wrought ill on you ; and an old soldier and Chemset did good to you ; and all of them will be rewarded in accord with their deserts. Perhaps, however, at my intercession, and because of a protracted torment, you will forgive your brothers and will cease to think of their faults.”

Taher granted the Caliph's prayer. Servants were sent to Basra ; and they returned, carrying a huge case fastened with a great lock, and a small golden chest secured by a dainty clasp. The huge case was opened ; and out came three large black dogs. Taher likewise opened the small chest and withdrew two phials, one green, the other red. Fragments of food were brought, into which he dropped liquid from the red phial ; and the dogs ate, and Taher cried aloud :

“ Be transformed into men ! ”

His brothers recovered their natural shapes, prostrated themselves before the Caliph, and kissed the hands of Taher.

At the request of the Caliph, Taher allowed the phials to be broken ; and they were smashed into a thousand pieces and straight-way cast into a well.

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Taher made peace with his brothers in presence of the Caliph ; who gave four robes of honour to each of them, and sent them away with many presents.

They all returned to Basra, where Taher's brothers took to their former calling as merchants.

And Taher ! many happy days passed for him in company with Qamr-el-Behar ; who gave a son to him, named Abdallah-ben-Taher ; and this son succeeded his father on the throne of Irem ; and his parents left this world for a better only when they were weighted down with years.

¹May the memory of this tale remain with you, for it shows that as one makes one's bed, so one lies upon it ; also that it is dangerous to play with fire, and that lies destroy all confidence ; withal, that words have meanings, that all things follow the law of necessity, that whosoever climbs a tree bent over a river risks drowning himself or breaking his neck : finally, that anyone who bothers himself about affairs of state instead of minding his own business generally gets a thwacking. Let us guard ourselves against denying the power of the Most High ; for it is illimitable. Blessings be on the author of this tale, the copyist, the narrator, and on all who listen !

¹ This ironical and burlesque paragraph is intended to put the hearers into a good humour and to make them well disposed for the collection always taken at the end of a story told in a café or other public resort.

THE END

